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General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

13th plenary meeting
Friday, 24 September 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by Mr. Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guinea.

Mr. Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Lansana Conté, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Conté (*spoke in French*): I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and to convey to you, on behalf of the people and Government of Guinea, my warmest congratulations. I am convinced that our Assembly stands to gain a great deal from your leadership and from your wealth of experience.

I would like also to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for his commendable efforts to advance the process of the reform of our Organization.

Finally, allow me to convey my sincere congratulations and words of encouragement to Mr. Kofi Annan, who, since taking the helm of our Organization, has worked tirelessly to make of it a catalyst and a unique framework for nations to work together. We share that conviction and would like to assure him of our unflagging support in that respect.

The present-day world is characterized by a rapid evolution that has taken the form of profound political, economic and social changes. Those changes have had an impact on peace, international security and development.

The quest for peace and for a new and more equitable international order has become the major concern of our age. The United Nations cannot insulate itself from these changes. Its effectiveness will depend on its ability to re-adapt itself to today's realities.

The reform of the United Nations, the maintenance of international peace and security, disarmament, the fight against poverty and the strengthening of international cooperation — all of these matters will require our attention and energy in the third millennium.

I am certain, therefore, that the Assembly will agree that the events taking place today clearly show the need to reform the United Nations.

All the arguments favour such a change as a means of strengthening the United Nations system and democratizing its main bodies, particular the Security Council, to make it into an authentic tool in the service peace and development for all. Our position on these

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issues is in accordance with that of the African Group as set forth at the thirty-fifth summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Algiers. The new make-up of the Security Council must fully reflect present-day realities through the equitable geographic representation of every region of the world.

The increasing number of conflicts is undermining the foundations of international peace and security and dangerously compromising the development efforts of our States. In this respect, I am sure the Assembly agrees that there can be no development without a consistent political commitment on the part of our States to peace and disarmament. That is why my delegation believes that any sign of indifference or silence on the part of the international community when confronted with the spectre of violence and the use of weapons of mass destruction can prove fatal for international peace and security.

As in the past, the Republic of Guinea can neither remain silent nor conceal its concern with regard to the increasing number of areas of tension and conflict throughout the world, particularly in Africa. Indeed, more than two thirds of the items currently on the agenda of the Security Council relate to critical situations in Africa. However, despite these difficult circumstances, our continent has courageously taken its destiny into its own hands by creating, under the auspices of the OAU, a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. With the assistance of the United Nations, this mechanism should be able to play a major role in maintaining peace on the continent.

Africa needs international cooperation if it is to make this instrument fully effective, given the breadth and complexity of the task that it must undertake. For some 10 years, West Africa has been particularly tested by the fratricidal wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. They have had very serious consequences for those countries, which have become fields of desolation and whose reconstruction will require the assistance of the international community for a long time to come.

In this context, particular attention should be paid to the unfortunate young people in those countries. Tens of thousands of adolescents have been dragged into those wars, and now they are skilled only at fighting. It is essential to provide for and ensure their economic and social integration so as to prevent them from becoming easy prey to the warlords who are laying waste to the region.

The consequences of the conflicts and tensions in the neighbouring countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau have affected Guinea in many ways and significantly impeded the achievement of its development targets. My country has provided asylum to several hundred thousands of refugees, whose presence in our land has had a very serious impact on its economy, environment and security. The impact of the refugees and the burden they represent for the country in general, and for the host populations in particular, have been enormous, making Guinea one of the leading countries of asylum in the world, since the high proportion of refugees makes up more than one tenth of its population.

This situation has affected the ability of the Government to achieve its priority development objectives because of the tremendous unforeseen expenses that Guinea has had to bear and will continue to have to bear in order to restore peace, security and stability in the subregion, together with the other States members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Despite the support of the international community in the face of these crises and conflicts that are convulsing our continent, it is regrettable to note the discriminatory way in which Africa is treated in dealing with the refugee problem. We should like here to welcome the gratifying initiative of the United Nations to make the Republic of Guinea the focal point of stability in the subregion.

In this connection, a solidarity conference to strengthen Guinea's stability and efforts for sustainable development will soon be held in Brussels. My country, which has high expectations of that meeting, would like to appeal to all donors to increase their support for the efforts of the Government of Guinea to deal with the socio-economic consequences of the massive presence of refugees in our territory.

I should like to reiterate to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, the sincere gratitude of the people of Guinea for his recent visit to our country, and I am pleased to be able solemnly to pay tribute to his personal action to mobilize the international community for the benefit of Guinea.

The subregion of West Africa is not the only one that has suffered from war. We remain deeply concerned by the fratricidal struggles that are convulsing Central Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo and Angola; those conflicts continue to be at the forefront of the international political scene. While deploring the situation, which is a threat to the stability of our continent, I should like here to call on all the parties concerned to give a chance to the negotiation and mediation efforts under way in various places so that those crises can be overcome. I congratulate the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity and encourage them to pursue their initiatives and concrete actions aimed at restoring peace in those countries.

Today more than ever, the Middle East needs peace and security. Such a peace can be built only with mutual confidence and the desire to live together, with respect for the rights and the dignity of all the peoples of the region. That is why we welcome the recent developments in the Middle East, particularly in Israel. The hopes that have been raised should not be dashed.

In Yugoslavia, the advent of peace requires tolerance and respect for the territorial integrity and the right to coexistence of all the various parts of that nation. The establishment of a true State based on the rule of law is the only way of guaranteeing the reconstruction of the country, with the assistance of the international community.

Another subject of major concern to Africa is that of economic matters and international cooperation. Here we must acknowledge that efforts to date have not yielded the results we had hoped for in meeting the needs and aspirations of our peoples. An in-depth, comprehensive, proactive approach to development problems, as defined at the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development, deserves the support and assistance of the international community. Unfortunately, one of the essential elements of such cooperation — the North-South dialogue so eagerly sought by our countries — remains at an impasse. All the while, disparities between the rich countries of the North and the underdeveloped countries of the South have grown. The arbitrary fixing of prices for commodities and manufactured goods by the North reduces to the point of futility the measures that have been proposed to alleviate the burden of external-debt servicing.

The system of trade too is based on discrimination. Under the banner of liberalization and free competition, globalization has had the effect of eroding or even eliminating preferences providing our commodities with access to the markets of the North. It is vital to establish timetables for adaptation and for the provision of alternative compensation so that our countries can maximize their potential as participants in world trade. Further, because of the importance of the fight against poverty in developing countries, we call upon donor countries to redouble their efforts to reach the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance.

Turning to the crucial question of debt, it is now our firm conviction that no economic-recovery programme can have the hoped-for results without a favourable approach to the backlog of debt burdening African countries, particularly the most heavily indebted among them. While my delegation welcomes the recent decisions taken by the Group of Eight at Cologne, we are nonetheless concerned that efforts need to be made to produce a lasting resolution of the debt question. Debt continues to swallow up the bulk of the resources of poor countries, particularly those in Africa, whose earnings are diminishing daily in spite of the great sacrifices made by our peoples with the adoption of structural adjustment measures.

We therefore call for the convening of an international conference on the external debt of Africa with a view to finding a final solution to this problem; this would revitalize our ever more fragile economies. I wish in that connection to say that my country is now engaged in ongoing dialogue with the Paris Club of Industrial Country Creditors, the relevant Consultative Group, and the donor community with a view to significant rescheduling of our external debt.

Turning to the question of human rights and democracy, my Government believes that the eradication of poverty, social inequality and ignorance is a prerequisite for the promotion of human rights. Even though we are living through a difficult situation, my country remains deeply committed to democratic values and fundamental freedoms and has created all the necessary institutions for a State based on law; the proper functioning of these will contribute to our political stability.

We have been witness to the gradual emergence of a sense of hope, common destiny and a new partnership among nations. Such a world vision, however, should not to cloak our profound concern at a time when humanity is preparing to cross the threshold of the third millennium. The international community must do everything in its power to bring about the triumph of hope, even if threats to the very existence of the world persist. If it is to shoulder these responsibilities to the full, the international community has no choice but to

help the United Nations adapt to the major changes under way in the world and must play its proper role in that world. More than ever before, mankind must understand that it bears responsibility for its own future.

In the name of human solidarity, the very fabric of international cooperation, I call upon all members of this great world family to make the United Nations a centre for harmonizing the efforts of the nations of the world, united in defence of our common destiny: a house in which all our wills converge resolutely, looking towards the future, and in which humanity can flourish and be united on the basis of freedom, justice, peace and prosperity. Long live the United Nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guinea for his statement.

Mr. Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Colonel (Retired) Yahya Jammeh, President of the Republic of the Gambia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of the Gambia.

Colonel (Retired) Yahya Jammeh, President of the Republic of the Gambia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of the Gambia, His Excellency Colonel (Retired) Yahya Jammeh, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Jammeh: Let me first of all congratulate you, Mr. President, on your unanimous election to preside over the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Only a few years ago, the United Nations was actively involved in the decolonization of then South West Africa, now Namibia. Today, it is with a great sense of pride, therefore, that we see not only an old freedom fighter but also a consummate diplomat from Namibia presiding over the last session of the General Assembly of the second millennium and ushering in the beginning of the third. I have no doubt whatsoever that with your vast experience you will steer this historic session to a successful conclusion. You can rest assured of the full support and cooperation of the Gambian delegation in carrying out your important assignments.

May I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing President, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for the business like manner in which he conducted the fifty-third session, an eventful period indeed, characterized by far-reaching decisions in areas of common concern to the international community.

In the same vein, I would like to commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the exemplary way in which he has been handling the affairs of our Organization.

Today, the membership of our Organization stands at the impressive figure of 188. In this connection, I would like, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Gambia, and indeed on my own behalf, to congratulate the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Kiribati and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission to membership in the United Nations. We are confident that these new Member States will bring with them all the charm and wisdom of island nations to enrich the work of the United Nations.

All nations, big or small, have something to offer. This is particularly true of small States that have no spheres of influence to preserve, but the honest desire to participate in and contribute to the betterment of our world. Small States have the advantage of coming up with refreshing ideas and offering new perspectives in the search for solutions to problems of common concern.

Making this world a better place for the human race to live in is the collective responsibility of all of us. All States, big or small, should contribute to the collective endeavour to rid this world of wars, hunger, destitution, disease, suffering, homelessness, despair, terror, tyranny and economic backwardness.

Making this world a better place to live is not a far-fetched dream. It is a goal we can achieve if all nations, collectively as well as individually, sincerely commit themselves to working towards achieving this goal. Our very survival as the human race in the new millennium depends on the achievement of this noble objective.

How do we achieve this noble objective? First of all, we must commit ourselves to living and working for peace on earth. We must respect the sovereign rights of nations, big or small, rich or poor, to exist without fear

of being marginalized, suppressed or intimidated by larger, richer or more populous nations. This is why, quite apart from the principle of universality, my Government sincerely believes that this body should seriously reconsider its position on the readmission of the Republic of China on Taiwan to the United Nations. With a population of almost 22 million and the nineteenth-largest economy in the world, and being the fifteenth-largest trading nation, the Republic of China — a highly responsible member of the international community, a free and democratic country that has always promoted world trade and socio-economic development around the world and at the same time has contributed to the eradication of poverty — has a lot to offer if readmitted to the United Nations. By allowing the 22 million people in Taiwan to be represented in the United Nations, we would be enforcing the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as contributing to the promotion of international peace and security.

Where this Assembly has recognized the then existence of two Germanies and the present existence of the two Koreas, the logic of the readmission of the Republic of China into this Assembly of nations is a matter of justice and equity. How can the United Nations sideline such an important country as if we were still living in the past?

For reasons that we all know too well, in 1971, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2758 (XXVI), by which it conferred membership upon the People's Republic of China. But the same resolution failed miserably to address the issue of representation in the United Nations for the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan. The cold war is over. The time has now come to correct this sad mistake, and there could not be a better time than now, when we are at the threshold of the twenty-first century, to recognize the Republic of China and, by extension, the voice of its 22 million people.

Having said that, I would now like to focus attention closer to home for a few minutes. Five years ago, when I led the Gambia National Army to take over the reigns of power in the Gambia, I was motivated by the sole desire to rescue my people from the abyss of despair and destruction after 30 years of rampant corruption and nepotism, to say the least. There was a general laissez-faire attitude that was rapidly assuming alarming proportions and that could have spelt disaster for the country had we not stepped in to put to an end the excesses of a rotten and morally bankrupt regime. It would be hard for anyone to imagine that a Government elected by the people would deprive its citizens of their basic needs for 30 long years. Not a single school, not a single hospital was built by that Government. That was why during the two-year transition to constitutional democratic rule, my Government immediately embarked on an intensive socio-economic development programme, building schools, hospitals, roads and bridges and carrying out other infrastructural development projects, such as building a new airport terminal and the extension of the port of Banjul.

It is now a thing of the past for any child to worry about trekking miles and miles to school. There are enough schools in all the administrative areas in the country, including high schools, for our children, especially the girls, to stay close to their homes and families. In this way we encourage parents to send their girls to school.

In addition to encouraging and increasing access to basic education for all Gambian children, my Government has identified a need to provide tertiary education and has established a university. The first batch of students will enrol in the University of The Gambia in October 1999.

Similarly, in the area of health, we have so far built two major hospitals, and a number of health centres around the country. Obviously we could not put right all the neglect of 30 years in just two years, but the difference is clear. Naturally the people of the Gambia wanted more progress. I was therefore persuaded by people across the country to resign from the army and run for office in a free and fair election under international supervision. I accepted the challenge, strengthened in my conviction that a direct mandate from the people would enable me to work harder for them. We have since been making greater strides in the uphill task of nation-building.

The very survival of the Gambia in this ever-changing world is an issue of major concern as we step into the next century, which will be fraught with many daunting challenges. The Gambia, like many other developing countries, has been forced to rethink its development agenda while looking for a more meaningful living environment for its people.

The desire of both Government and people for a developed nation is clearly expressed in the country's development blueprint, "Vision 2020, The Gambia Incorporated". Our macroeconomic policies and strategies continue to be spearheaded by Vision 2020,

with an overall goal of achieving sustainable growth and eradicating poverty.

My Government is working very closely with the World Bank, the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme and all the specialized agencies of the United Nations system in their fields of competence in order to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and disease so that as a healthy nation founded on solid, democratic principles of good governance, we can stride ahead to build a nation with a strong economy in an atmosphere of social justice and political stability.

Recognizing that improving the governance environment is a sine qua non for sustainable development, the Government of the Gambia has incorporated good-governance strategies in all national development initiatives and plans. The Gambia National Governance Programme, which was recently launched, was developed through an extensive process of consultation and consensus-building.

In our bid to create an atmosphere of dignity and respect for our citizenry we are fully committed to democratic constitutionality. We consider this the only feasible political framework for good governance, which is an essential prerequisite for sustainable development. We also believe that democracy cannot exist in a situation of abject poverty. Our national governance programme includes provisions for constitutional review and reform of the electoral system and process; reform of parliamentary structures and processes; civic education; reform of the legal and judicial process; public-sector management and administrative reform; and decentralization and local government reform.

Given the complexity and scope of the governance policy framework, its effective implementation will require careful planning and mobilization of resources. A round-table conference, to be organized very soon, will seek to mobilize further support to cover part of the funding gap. It is our hope that our partners in development will continue to support us in this endeavour.

We are mindful that meaningful socio-economic development can be brought about and be sustained only in an atmosphere of stability and security — not only in our own country, but also in its neighbouring countries. With the world becoming more globalized, lack of security and peace in any one part of the world affects the rest of mankind, especially those of us in the developing countries. We place a high premium on the maintenance of peace and stability both at home and abroad.

This is why, in our sister republic of Guinea-Bissau, we all worked hard, encouraged by the rest of the international community, to put a definitive end to the conflict there. In our efforts to achieve this objective, we, together with other West African countries, participated in the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) peacekeeping operations in Guinea-Bissau, even though the whole mission itself was short-lived. Now that peace and stability have been returned to that country, we encourage the international community to contribute to the country's reconciliation and reconstruction effort.

The Gambia, as coordinator of the work of the group of friends of Guinea-Bissau at the United Nations, will continue to play a leading role in this endeavour. In the same vein, in our continuing search for peace and stability in our subregion we in the Gambia have spearheaded efforts to mediate in the Casamance question through dialogue. As a result, in June of this year we gathered together in Banjul all the stakeholders in the Casamance issue with a view to providing a forum for the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) factions to articulate a common position for their impending dialogue with the Government of Senegal. This has been yielding positive results as it has already led to a cessation of hostilities in the Casamance region of Senegal. The cessation of hostilities, which is a consequence of the Banjul encounters, has been so encouraging that refugees have started to return home even before a final settlement is reached. At last we can see light at the end of the tunnel.

The momentum created by the Banjul meetings among the MFDC factions should be maintained. A final MFDC meeting will soon be convened and is expected to herald formal consultations between the Government of Senegal and the MFDC. These, we hope, will lead to a lasting settlement that will put an end to the devastation and its attendant human suffering.

Meanwhile, in our sister Republic of Sierra Leone, it is gratifying to note that a peace agreement has now been signed between the Government and the Revolutionary United Front after almost nine years of one of the most devastating, fratricidal and brutal wars of our time, a war characterized by outrageous atrocities committed by the rebels. We commend the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) leaders, ECOMOG, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone

and all those who contributed in one way or another to bringing about this peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The Lomé Peace Agreement is not the ideal peace agreement, but most peace agreements come with a price. The Sierra Leonean people paid dearly. We hope that, despite all the shortcomings of the Agreement, it will create hope and opportunity for the people of Sierra Leone and free them from terror, violence, killings, amputations and the many other atrocities that characterized this war.

The people of Sierra Leone have also welcomed this chance to make a fresh start. They should not be abandoned to fate. The international community has an obligation to come in rapidly, and in a big way, to help in the implementation of the Agreement.

It would be an understatement to say that Africa is making great strides in the peaceful resolution of conflicts there. A good example is the complex conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: we are encouraged by the signing of a Ceasefire Agreement in Lusaka. On behalf of the Government and people of the Gambia, I thank President Chiluba of Zambia and all other leaders in Africa who contributed to finding a political settlement to this complex conflict.

We note that the Security Council has deployed military liaison officers to the relevant States to lay the groundwork for the deployment of military observers. We appreciate this move by the United Nations. We must, however, sound a note of caution: the situation is extremely volatile. We must therefore move swiftly, before there is a relapse into fighting. We must not let this opportunity slip away.

Likewise, in the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, we welcome the calm that has prevailed for a while. Most importantly, we welcome the agreement of the parties to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Framework Agreement. We commend the leadership role of the OAU in its efforts to resolve this fratricidal conflict. We must, however, say that we are yet to see a ceasefire agreement. The parties must therefore be encouraged to translate their pronouncements into action by signing a ceasefire agreement immediately. We must emphasize that the United Nations should be ready to come in as soon as it is propitious to contribute to the implementation of the agreement.

After a long and difficult period of negotiations, some good news is coming out of Western Sahara. We note with appreciation that the identification process has progressed considerably. Plans for the repatriation of the refugees have also advanced. Finally, we are coming close to the referendum. We praise the Kingdom of Morocco for its flexibility, understanding, cooperation and courage throughout this period.

Elsewhere on the continent, the political landscape is still hazy.

In Angola, the peace process has broken down completely due to UNITA's intransigence and flat refusal to implement in good faith the Lusaka Protocol. It is very clear to all of us that there is no military solution to that conflict. After about 30 years of war, the people of Angola have suffered enormously, especially the women and children. The future of a whole generation has been compromised. We urge the international community to take decisive action to ensure a peaceful and speedy resolution of that conflict. To this end, we welcome the recent re-establishment of a United Nations presence in Angola. Such a presence is vital, but clearly it must be buttressed by a resolute commitment of the Security Council to producing the much-needed peace in Angola as soon as possible.

In the case of Somalia, it is a completely different scenario. The warlords are holding the international community hostage because of their own insatiable appetite to assume power at all costs. We note that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is doing all it can to resolve this long and complex conflict, but without much success. If a resolution to this conflict is to be found, we should shake off the Somalia syndrome and re-engage the issue. The international community should recommit itself to the resolution of the Somali crisis by developing a strategy that would send clear signals to the warlords that their behaviour and attitude can no longer be tolerated by civilized society.

In the case of the Sudan, my delegation welcomes wholeheartedly the peace overtures of the Government. We believe that they are a first step in the right direction. We encourage the other side to respond, and to respond positively. The international community should also support the parties in finding a lasting solution.

This brief survey of the theatres of conflict in Africa reveals once again that our continent unfortunately continues to claim the lion's share of trials and tribulations. This is as embarrassing as it is unacceptable and we must redouble our efforts to reverse the situation.

Away from the African continent, there are other conflict situations that continue to pose serious threats to international peace and security and, therefore, are of serious concern to my delegation.

With regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, my Government, whilst reiterating its full support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the principle of land for peace, leading to an independent Palestinian homeland, also supports fully the Middle East peace process and the remarkable leadership role that the United States is playing to move the process forward. The solution to the problem lies both with Israel and in Palestine, as well as with the international community. This is why we believe that the implementation of the Wye River agreement, in letter and spirit, would usher in a new era of hope for the entire Middle East region.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, my delegation continues to follow very closely the consequences of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait — in particular, the unresolved problems of the Kuwaiti prisoners of war, missing persons, the Kuwaiti archives and stolen property. There is nothing more painful than the mental torture that the families of the prisoners of war and missing persons have been going through all these years. To treat this matter lightly would be tantamount to adding insult to injury. We can imagine the pain, the anguish, the uncertainty and the endless nightmares of over 600 Kuwaiti families still hoping to hear from their loved ones. This is why my Government will never allow this aspect of the problem between Iraq and Kuwait to be swept under the carpet. It is a humanitarian problem that must not be politicized and must be given all the attention that it deserves.

In the same vein, the restitution of the Kuwaiti archives and other property is something that cannot be relegated to the category of secondary issues. Depriving a nation of its archives is like robbing it of its national identity.

As for the question of the disarmament of Iraq, we deplore the current stalemate. The status quo is unacceptable, yet the Security Council appears to be divided on how to move forward. The Council should show unity and remain steadfast; otherwise it would be sending the wrong signal: that any country can dictate the terms of its compliance with the wishes of the international community and get away with it. If that is allowed to happen, we would be setting a very dangerous precedent. Council members must make an effort to draw a line between their narrow national interests and the collective interests of humankind.

Just as we are unequivocal with regard to the disarmament of Iraq, we are equally uncompromising when it comes to the alleviation of the unwarranted suffering of the ordinary Iraqi people who, unfortunately, have to bear the brunt of any sanctions. The oil-for-food programme is a laudable effort to mitigate the impact of sanctions, but that is just about it. We want to see the removal, destruction or rendering harmless of all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, but we do not subscribe to the destruction of Iraq under any pretext whatsoever. It is disheartening to see what sanctions have done to the innocent women, children and elderly people of Iraq. This, too, is unacceptable and was not the objective of the sanctions. A net distinction must henceforth be made between the regime and the people. As with all other existing and future sanctions, they must be clearly targeted at those responsible in order to avoid inflicting undue pain and suffering on innocent people.

Still on the thorny issue of sanctions, my Government is pleased that sanctions imposed on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya have been suspended, but we cannot wait to see them lifted completely because Libya has fulfilled all its international obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions. We call for the immediate and complete lifting of all the sanctions imposed on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Cuba, too, has been reeling under unjust sanctions for 38 years now. These sanctions should be scrapped because they are counterproductive and inhumane. We are of the opinion that the new millennium should usher in an era devoid of avoidable and man-made disasters and conflicts that wreak untold suffering on the innocent. Today, at the threshold of the new millennium, we should forgive and forget the past and reconcile in order to make this world a better place for mankind. We therefore reiterate our call for the immediate lifting of the economic and financial blockade imposed on Cuba.

Whilst it is important to uphold the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, when a State exceeds all bounds and engages in the heinous policy of ethnic cleansing, as in Kosovo, the rest of the international community cannot remain silent. The timely adoption of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) marked a watershed in the history of the conflict, the full implementation of which, we hope, will bring lasting peace to Kosovo.

On the issue of East Timor, I would like to congratulate the East Timorese on the successful conduct of the historic ballot. Nothing would have been possible, though, without the courageous first step that was taken by the Indonesian Government leading to the 5 May Agreement, which in turn set the whole process in motion. However, we are greatly appalled at and shocked by the level of violence that ensued immediately after the verdict of the East Timorese people was made known to the international community. In this context, we welcome the deployment of the multinational force.

While we rejoice with the people of Kosovo and East Timor for the timely international efforts to restore peace, we cannot but express despair at the slow or sometimes lack of response to African conflicts. We insist that one life in Angola or elsewhere in Africa is no less important than one life in Kosovo or East Timor. The Security Council must therefore be evenhanded and establish principled criteria for humanitarian intervention.

In the wake of the many conflicts the world over, there should be a concerted international effort to address the issue of impunity. We share the philosophy that there can be no peace without justice, no justice without law and no meaningful law without a court to decide what is just and lawful under any given circumstances.

Because of this conviction, we support international efforts to establish an International Criminal Court (ICC) which would have jurisdiction over war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. We encourage all States to consider ratifying the Statute of the ICC. The Gambia has already signed the Statute and has since set the process in motion for its ratification.

There is a phenomenon, though, that constitutes a cause for greater concern to my delegation, and that is the recruitment and conscription of children as soldiers. This constitutes a total breakdown of our fundamental value systems. It must be stopped, as it is a blatant violation of international law and all norms of civilized behaviour.

The issue of the child soldier is a moral one, and it is the collective responsibility of the international community to fight against a situation where the leaders of tomorrow are exposed to a life of violence, vengeance and hate, a situation which breeds in their minds the dangerous notion that he who wields the gun demands and deserves respect. The plight of the children in the refugee camps does not augur well for a brighter future as they invariably grow up with vengeful hearts towards those they deem to be responsible for their plight. In a nutshell, an end to all conflicts is the only means to arrest this tragic trend.

Another social malaise of a deadlier threat to all societies, rich and poor alike, is the drug menace. This scourge threatens the very fabric of society and indeed the fixture of mankind, as it respects no national boundary. It is also a major cause of most crimes and violence in our urban centres, and it has grown to such proportions that it is beyond the capacity of any single State to eradicate it. Thus, we applaud the timely initiative of President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico for convening a special session devoted to the drug problem. This special session no doubt rekindled the interest that we all share in the fight against drugs. We all crave for a drug-free world. A daunting task though it may be, we must take up the challenge because the stakes are so high that we cannot afford to be complacent.

The issue of small arms and landmines is also a perennial problem which continues to fuel and exacerbate conflicts in Africa and elsewhere with devastating consequences. We oppose the proliferation of small arms and the laying of landmines and call for international partnership to address this concern. In this context, we urge arms manufacturing countries to exercise restraint in their transfer of arms to regions of conflict. In this context, we welcome the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

Equally worrisome is the illicit trafficking in small arms and sensitive technologies. On the wider question of disarmament, whilst we recognize the efforts being made towards the achievement of a fissile material cut-off treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, we continue to add our voice to the campaign for the total elimination of all nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, we look forward to the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Before closing the chapter on the review of the international political scene, I would like to thank all the people and organizations, as well as members of the international community, who have been working relentlessly to devise peaceful and negotiated solutions to the problems besetting mankind today. We, the younger generation, would want to live in a conflict-free and crisis-free world in the third millennium. We would want to bequeath to the next generation a world devoid of

wars, poverty, hunger, racism and deprivation; a world where the whole of humankind would live like a single family; a world where meaningful socio-economic development would be the collective responsibility of all the world's citizens; a world where peace, love, mutual respect and collective security would be the order of the day.

It has since become an established fact that poverty is the root cause of many conflicts in the world, particularly in Africa.

It is gratifying to note that following the social summit a number of poverty eradication strategies have been elaborated, and it is our fervent hope that the special session of the General Assembly devoted to the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and further initiatives will give fresh impetus to the campaign for the eradication of poverty. One effective way of eradicating poverty in Africa would be the total cancellation of all of the continent's external debts. The debt burden is the cause of untold suffering to the masses of Africa's women, children and the elderly.

Regarding the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative (HIPC), much as it could be characterized as laudable, it must be recognized that the eligibility criteria for accessing HIPC assistance are very restrictive and penalize those countries that really need assistance. For example, the Gambia, with a high debt service ratio of 33 per cent of the gross domestic product, although meeting the other two criteria — first, establishing a track record of good performance and, secondly, eligibility under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility and International Development Association-sponsored programmes — has been excluded.

My delegation strongly appeals for an across-the-board cancellation of all Africa's debts so as to give us a new lease on life in the coming millennium.

Talk about poverty eradication would be incomplete without mention of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. I have no doubt whatsoever that if the resources required are made available to fund all the components of the Initiative within a reasonable time-frame, we could already claim victory in the battle against poverty. In this regard, we note with satisfaction, the Economic and Social Council meeting held in Geneva during the month of July and the attention given to the segment on the development of Africa.

All said and done, in this era of globalization and liberalization, our salvation lies in regional integration and cooperation if we are to achieve economies of scale and collective self-reliance. This is why we in the Gambia attach a lot of importance to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as one of the building blocks of the African Economic Community. For us Africans, the Lagos Plan of Action and indeed the Final Act of Lagos constitute the blue print for the economic development of Africa. It is even more relevant today than ever before.

At the continental level, we the African leaders decided at the recently concluded OAU extraordinary summit in Sirte, Libya, to form a Union of African States which would put us in a better position to tackle the continent's economic and political crises that have plagued us throughout this century. However, I want to emphasize that the objective of this African continental union is not to form a military bloc, but an economic and political one capable of resolving Africa's numerous crises and conflicts, with the ultimate objective of eradicating poverty in Africa.

Today, as we speak, the gap between rich and poor has widened threefold. The 1999 Human Development Report has made stunning revelations, raised important issues and made a series of recommendations. The challenges are daunting, but with the necessary political will poverty can be eradicated, and, as stated in that report the challenge is "to ensure that globalization works for people — not just for profits". In this endeavour, there should be greater cooperation between North and South.

I would like at this juncture to salute President Bill Clinton's bold initiative to visit the African continent, the second by a sitting American President in peacetime. This visit is very important as it gives the United States Administration first-hand knowledge of the numerous problems and challenges facing our continent. It also strengthens the historic bonds linking the United States and Africa. This is a positive development that should be nurtured, as the United States will continue to play a pivotal role in Africa's socio-economic development. The massive financial and economic assistance given to some African countries as a result of the visit could go a long way towards improving the living conditions of the people in those countries, as well as ensuring a bright future for the African continent as a whole.

Thus, I cannot but express my sincere appreciation and gratitude, on behalf of the youth of Africa, for this bold and laudable initiative taken by President Clinton, and I hope that it will be emulated by future United States Administrations.

It is our fervent hope, therefore, that as we approach the threshold of the new millennium, we will draw inspiration from the Charter of the United Nations by giving concrete expression to the pledge made therein "to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples".

We anxiously look forward to the Millennium Assembly, which, beyond its symbolism, could provide a unique opportunity to renew our commitment and rededicate our efforts to the attainment of this goal. It would be inexcusable if we were not strengthened in our resolve to eradicate poverty in the next millennium. With all the global conferences since the beginning of the decade on almost all issues of common concern, a solid foundation has thus been laid. All we have to do is build upon it.

It is against this background that we are poised to embrace the third millennium and all that it has in store for us. Caught between the spectre of nuclear holocaust and the overpowering and irrepressible phenomenon of globalization, our only hope for survival depends on how far we are committed to putting our collective security before our narrow, individual national interests. This in turn is only possible through multilateralism, and the latter has proved its worth through the United Nations.

Having learned numerous bitter lessons, including the fact of two world wars in this century, the compelling need to create the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war is more valid now than ever before, taking into account the rapid advances in military technology and the devastating effects of modern weaponry. Our Organization has withstood the test of time, and as long as we continue individually and collectively to make every effort to uphold the lofty ideals enshrined in the Charter, we can together make this world a better place for all mankind.

The United Nations is certainly not irreproachable, but it is definitely irreplaceable and indispensable. It is the embodiment of our hopes and aspirations. This is why we are emboldened in our conviction that, despite some acerbic criticism, we envisage an even greater role for the United Nations in the twenty-first century. It was therefore very timely to adopt the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace shortly before the beginning of this session.

In this connection, it is important to carry out reforms when and where necessary to address the Organization's shortcomings. The organ that needs serious and urgent reform more than any other is the Security Council. The importance of this body cannot be over-emphasized, but its present composition, especially at the level of permanent membership, is unacceptable, to say the least. Its composition should reflect the realities of the day and must be democratic and transparent in its working methods.

To begin with, it is a fact that Africa, the second largest continent, is not represented at the permanent member level. This anomaly should be rectified immediately; the[re] we can take it from there. Also not acceptable is [th]e veto power wielded by the five permanent members, a practice that is diametrically opposed to the principles of democracy and human rights. I propose that the veto power be abolished during the course of the United Nations reform process.

As my country's term on the Security Council draws to an end, I would like to seize this opportunity on behalf of the Government and people of the Gambia, and indeed on my own behalf, to express our sincere gratitude to the entire membership of the United Nations for the confidence reposed in us to represent you. We also thank Members most sincerely for the partnership and cooperation, the advice and support, without which it would not have been possible to carry out the mandate entrusted to us. As a small country, our contribution might have been modest, but it was sincere, in our collective endeavour to make this world a better place for humankind. This noble goal, in my view, is what the United Nations stands for.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of t[he] Republic of the Gambia for the statement he has ju[st] m[a]de.

Colonel (Retired) Yahya Jammeh, President of the Republic of the Gambia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guyana.

Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Guyana, His Excellency Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Jagdeo: I am pleased to have this opportunity, the first since my assumption of the presidency of Guyana, to share with the Assembly some issues of interest and concern to the Group of 77, which Guyana now has the honour to chair.

A mere three months remain before mankind enters a new millennium filled with great hopes. Whether those hopes are realized will depend largely on the decisions we take, as an organization of united peoples, on how we collectively face the future. This fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly therefore represents a crucial turning point where we can follow either the high road to enlightened multilateralism or the low road leading to narrow self-interest.

I am confident that the Assembly will not fail to take the right direction. As the Foreign Minister of Namibia, Mr. President, you have given long and distinguished service to your country, which, after a bitter struggle against apartheid rule, stands as an independent and proud member of the family of nations. On behalf of the Group of 77, I salute Namibia and offer to you personally our warmest congratulations and good wishes for a successful Assembly.

To your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, we offer our sincere appreciation for the guidance provided to the Assembly over the past year.

A warm welcome is also extended to the three new members of the United Nations — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

And to our Secretary-General I wish to convey our gratitude for his sustained stewardship of the Secretariat, and more particularly for his report on the Organization's work.

The challenges we must address this year are formidable. Our world continues to be plagued by a multiplicity of conflicts, both old and new, inter-State and intra-State, that have not only imperilled global peace and security but also sap our economic and social vitality. Whether in Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Middle East or the Great Lakes region of Africa — to name just a few conflict zones — a heavy toll is being exacted on human life and development. Equally disturbing is the apparent inability of the world community to contain this increase in tensions and conflicts.

The world Organization is continuously challenged by the outbreak of internecine strife in one country after another. Without a clear strategy, the United Nations can do no more than muddle through these crises in the hope that the warring factions will eventually see the virtues of peace. In these distressing circumstances, it is not only the parties to the conflict that are losers but also the international community. As a result of the increasing claims for peacemaking and peacekeeping operations, developing countries are deprived of much needed development resources and are politically weakened. Gradually the United Nations must move forward into the area of peace-building to obviate recidivism and to reconstruct shattered societies. By helping to strengthen democracy, government institutions and the rule of law, as well as rebuilding the foundations for long-term development, the Organization can help post-conflict States to rebuild themselves.

The time may have come to revisit the United Nations Agenda for Peace, as well as its Agenda for Development, to see where deficiencies lie and what could be done to remedy them.

The time has also come to strengthen the Security Council, the organ primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, so that it may become more democratic, representative and credible. Of course, the United Nations cannot do what the parties to conflict are not prepared to do. Without a true commitment to peace by all involved there can be scant prospect of any lasting settlement. As we have seen from recent developments in the Middle East, the parties involved must show a strong will to resolve the conflict through peaceful means. Only then can the United Nations, using the instruments provided by its Charter, serve to facilitate negotiations for a satisfactory outcome.

Accompanying these threats to international security and stability are strong economic and social forces which impact negatively on our countries. While globalization and trade liberalization have benefited strong economies, they have also exposed weaker States to marginalization from the world economy. By opening the floodgates of trade and finance, globalization has invariably wrought

havoc on small and weak economies, which can do precious little to withstand its impact. Economic and social misery have followed in its wake, exposing the particular vulnerabilities of small developing countries, many of which are dependent on a single agricultural crop — like bananas or sugar — for the livelihood of their peoples.

At the regional meetings which have been held thus far in preparation for the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD X) caution has been sounded against the worst excesses of trade liberalization. Having benefited from the Tokyo and Uruguay Rounds, the industrialized countries are anxious to hold further negotiations — the mother of all rounds — for free trade in the next millennium. Theoretically, developing countries can also gain from increased liberalization. However, since they are for the most part too weak to take advantage of the new opportunities, they run the risk of greater marginalization and, indeed, elimination from the market place.

Fear of this eventuality is based not on uninformed speculation, but on the harsh reality of experience. Past negotiating rounds have yielded significant concessions to developed economies, while offering relatively little to developing countries in terms of opening up markets for their own products. At bottom, the problem is one of an imbalance in negotiating strength of its contracting parties, resulting in more favourable outcomes for the strongest. Yet the developing countries are being urged to enter into a new round of negotiations, the millennium round, the result of which is likely to be no different from that of the past unless its agenda is balanced by issues of concern to the developing countries.

To be able to enter the global marketplace, developing countries should be assisted in the strengthening of their productive capacities and in widening their access to export markets. They need to be assured of stabilization in the international financial and monetary system in order to avoid the hazards of currency fluctuations. Equally important, given the vast disparity which exists in the economic capacities of countries, special and differential treatment should be granted to developing countries in accordance with the principles outlined in part IV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the GATT legislative clause of 1971.

Special consideration will have to be given to Africa, the least developed countries and structurally weak economies, in particular the small island developing States, which are seriously disadvantaged in the area of trade. The special session to review the Programme of Action with regard to the sustainable development of small island developing States, which will be held here in just a matter of days, and the summit of the least developed countries scheduled for the year 2001 should serve to generate new initiatives to help these vulnerable States.

However, to benefit from the international trading system developing countries must receive significant debt relief and the necessary official development assistance to boost the overall productive capability. Consequently, in the face of rampant globalization, it is imperative that the international community should come together to create a modern development vision and strategy aimed at bridging the dangerous division which now separates the prosperous from the poor nations. This new approach should be based on an international consensus on development and on the rights and obligations of the partners.

As the preparations undertaken this year for the review of the summits held in Beijing, Cairo and Copenhagen have shown, there is an increasing number of people, the majority of them women and children, living under adverse conditions caused by poverty. Despite great strides in the fields of health and education in the developed world, many developing countries continue to be plagued by unequal and inadequate access to education and health care, high infant and maternal mortality, as well as lack of access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation. Indeed, low levels of health have inhibited the achievement of socially and economically productive lives, not to mention the devastating social and economic impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well as malaria, on a number of developing countries, particularly in Africa.

The Cologne initiative to expand the scope and provision of relief for the heavily indebted poor countries was a welcome step forward. Unfortunately, however, it does not go far enough to alleviate the debt burden which the developing countries still bear. Nothing short of the cancellation of some of these countries' debts will be sufficient to improve their circumstances to the point where they can be active participants in the world economy. The situation of many low-income countries has been made even more acute by the rapid decline of official development assistance in the wake of globalization's spread and over reliance on the market to promote development.

The financing of development must therefore be placed on a more sound and predictable basis. The Group of 77 therefore attaches the greatest importance to the holding of a high-level conference by the year 2001 to address this pressing issue. We believe that if Member States can address all aspects of the problem — particularly those identified in the Secretary-General's report on financing for development — we may yet find solutions that are acceptable and effective. Crucial to the successful outcome of the conference, however, is a general acceptance of a more enlightened approach to international development cooperation based on a genuine concept of interdependence and partnership.

Indeed, there is an acute need for a new global agenda with the objective of putting a human face on the marketplace. Policies aimed merely at creating unsustainable social safety nets are hardly lasting solutions. The root causes of the structural and endemic problems of the developing countries, which ultimately lead to global instability, must be addressed.

For their part, the developing countries which constitute the Group of 77 are committed to the search for ways and means by which we can accelerate the development process. Even before the conference on financing for development, we shall meet in Havana, Cuba, next year for the first ever South summit. The Summit is a long-cherished idea whose time has finally come. It will allow the South a special opportunity to examine the impact which globalization continues to have on developing countries, as well as the policies and strategies needed to harness the process and make it more amenable to control. In this context, North-South relations must be reviewed to see how they may be enhanced and put on a new basis for mutual trust and advantage.

Understandably, the central focus of the South Summit must be the strengthening of the unity and solidarity of the Group of 77 and the identification of concrete initiatives to promote practical cooperation between members. We have also agreed to devote our attention to the promulgation of knowledge and technology in order, hopefully, to achieve a quantum leap towards our development. This, after all, is an area in which the South can boast of remarkable advances and of many centres of excellence that can be utilized for the dissemination of skills and technology among the countries of the Group of 77. The North can, of course, do much to facilitate these exchanges by providing requisite financing and supplying appropriate technology and knowledge that would make the developing countries more self-reliant and at the same time more competitive in the world economy.

Coming, as it does, in the early months of the new millennium, the South summit will certainly provide an indication of the direction for the future. In Havana we hope to have in attendance our developed partners, which significantly, are usually present at all of our important deliberations as observers. Also expected to participate in the event are other key players in the development process, such as our non-governmental organizations and representatives of the private sector. Together, through an interactive dialogue, we hope to forge a programme of action which will serve as a catalyst for the development of our countries and our peoples. Indeed, if given the chance, the South summit, I dare say, will prove to be an inspiration for the Millennium Assembly and for a new compact on human development for the twenty-first century.

Speaking for Guyana, I wish to reaffirm our Government's intention to continue working for the creation of a new global human order aimed at the eradication of poverty and the establishment of a just and more humane system of international relations. Conceived by our late President Cheddi Jagan, whose entire life was dedicated to empowering the poor and the weak — not only in his native Guyana, but throughout the world — the outlines of this new order have been presented at major international forums, including the World Summit for Social Development, which was held in 1995 in Denmark. All 14 heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), along with other world leaders and eminent personalities, have declared their full support for the proposal and their commitment to its widest promulgation. We will therefore seek at this session to advance it for further consideration.

Although much is being made of the dawning of the millennium, it is obviously too much to expect that it will bring solutions to all of the world's problems. It can provide, however, an auspicious opportunity for the international community to reflect upon the past achievements, its present challenges and future aspirations. With a firm sense of purpose and resolve, let us use this occasion to create a brave new world in which all our peoples may hope to live in peace — free from fear, poverty and want.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guyana for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

Address by Mr. Janez Drnovsek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr. Drnovsek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr. Janez Drnovsek, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Drnovsek (Slovenia): Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, and your country, Namibia, on your election as President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I am convinced that your experience and diplomatic skills will help this General Assembly to fulfil its important tasks. I would also like to thank the outgoing President, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for the guidance he provided to the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

Let me also take this opportunity to warmly welcome the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Kiribati and the Kingdom of Tonga, which have just joined the United Nations family.

We are gathered here at the threshold not just of a new century but of a new millennium. It is appropriate, therefore, that we take advantage of this important occasion to reflect upon our situation in the world today. I speak here not of our situation as individuals or even as nations, but as a race.

There are many signs of progress, and there are reasons for hope. However, the ultimate goal of world peace still seems elusive. The number of conflicts is significantly increasing. All over the world, millions of civilians are the victims of well-planned and systematic policies of killing, displacement, property destruction and intimidation. At the end of last year, the number of people worldwide who had been evicted from their homes stood at more than 21 million.

East Timor and Kosovo are just two tragic examples of typical cases of contemporary armed conflicts. These are conflicts frequently take place within what the outside world recognizes as State borders, rather than between previously established States. Today, these types of wars amount to more than 90 per cent of those raging in the world.

To make matters even worse, the number of civilians killed in these nominally "internal" wars is sharply increasing. A new kind of warfare is developing in which civilians are a primary strategic target. "Ethnic cleansing", massacres and a horrifying variety of war crimes have become weapons for achieving political, economic and military goals. Ethnic, religious, national and social inequalities are frequently used as a smokescreen to hide the reality of massacre and conquest from the rest of the world. Furthermore, these inequalities are exploited by ruthless leaders, who use them as a tool to achieve very concrete aims. We have seen this phenomenon in almost all of the armed conflicts of recent times — in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Afghanistan and, most recently, in East Timor.

How should the international community react to gross violations of human rights — violations that amount to threats to international peace and security? When and how can the international community seek to establish that a sovereign Government cannot, or does not want to, prevent a humanitarian catastrophe? When and by what criteria does it decide to use its instruments of enforcement?

All United Nations Member States must think hard about these questions. We are grateful to the Secretary-General, who made, at the beginning of this debate, a significant contribution to such thinking.

This turn-of-the-century crime wave cries out for new approaches and new ways of protecting vulnerable civilian populations. Armed conflicts have in fact become a problem for humankind, not just for the nation or nations directly concerned.

The international community must innovate as it seeks to solve these pressing humanitarian problems. Our basic aim has to be human security, and here I mean

physical and not just legal security. Slovenia welcomes and participates in the initiatives of like-minded countries which are determined to give full meaning and specific practical expression to the concept of human security. In addition, as one answer to these challenges, new and more sophisticated concepts of peacekeeping operations are being developed. New methods of conflict prevention should also be explored. Preventive diplomacy, preventive deployment, preventive disarmament and post-conflict peace-building are the orders of the day.

We have to ensure respect for human rights. We are firm in our belief that a determined commitment to promote and protect human rights has to be an underlying principle for the activities of the United Nations at the threshold of the new millennium. We have to create conditions for good governance, the rule of law, sustainable development and social justice. All of these tasks and many others require creative thinking and bold action. Solving these thorny problems is a prerequisite for peace and prosperity. This is also the way to prevent conditions which directly feed the flames of the conflicts that I have described.

As an elected member of the Security Council, we are contributing to the maintenance of world peace and security. We are cooperating actively in the resolution of crises in South-Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. We believe that special importance should be attached to preventive action in situations posing a potential threat to international peace but which have not yet developed into armed conflict. Where situations have already escalated into armed conflict, no effort should be spared in finding a peaceful and timely resolution. We recognize the recent Security Council mission to Jakarta and Dili, in which Slovenia took part, as an innovative approach by the United Nations in dealing with crisis situations. Clearly, we welcome this.

Finally, in post-conflict situations, such as Kosovo, continued coordinated action by the international community is necessary. It is only by working in concert that the United Nations, regional organizations and other international players can be effective. Only in this way can the difficult goals that have been set be achieved. These goals include bringing political and economic stabilization, democratization, the protection of human rights to the territory in question and establishing a functional legal system there.

The changing nature of armed conflicts is also changing the role of the Security Council as it discharges its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. We note the increased readiness and determination of regional organizations to take on their share of responsibility for the maintenance of regional peace and security. As many examples of fruitful collaboration attest, relations between the Security Council and these regional organizations are relations not of competition but rather of cooperation. We therefore commend the increased role of regional organizations under Chapter VIII of the Charter.

Let me continue by presenting some elements that we must consider in any international response to the changing nature of armed conflicts. There is an unacceptably wide — even a growing — gap between the existing norms of international humanitarian and human rights law and common situations on the ground: human rights are frequently and openly violated. Determined and united action by the international community is needed to ensure that the existing norms of human rights are fully observed.

Those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity must be brought to justice. This is primarily the responsibility of States, which must act both individually through their national systems of justice, and collectively through an effective international justice system. Failure to act is no more and no less than an invitation to those capable of creating new, even more serious cycles of human tragedy to do just that.

Whether there is to be human progress and development depends on the result of this confrontation between the rule of international law and those who stand to benefit directly from lawlessness. International indifference can only reward such people. In this regard, Slovenia attaches particular importance to the need to ensure more effective, comprehensive and efficient delivery of international justice. We are supportive of the two existing United Nations International Criminal Tribunals and of the ongoing process designed to give birth to a permanent International Criminal Court. To this end we have begun the legislative procedures necessary to ratify the Rome Statute. We are also contributing to efforts to complete the mandate of the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court.

Peacekeeping operations have in recent years become increasingly multidimensional: they encompass not only demanding military tasks but also a variety of other functions, such as civilian police activities, support for humanitarian assistance, practical disarmament

measures, demobilization and integration of former combatants, and enhancing and monitoring human rights.

I should like to avail myself of this important occasion to affirm that Slovenia considers peacekeeping to be one of the key instruments available to the United Nations in discharging its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. We have increased our participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations — and are committed to further increasing our participation in the near future — not only in terms of military personnel but also of civilian police and humanitarian aid workers.

Disarmament efforts are a vital ingredient in the maintenance of international peace and security. The achievements of past years have been considerable, especially in such areas as chemical weapons and the comprehensive ban on nuclear weapon testing. However, there is a need to strengthen disarmament work, in the area not only of weapons of mass destruction but also in reducing flows of conventional arms. We hope that the Conference on Disarmament will be strengthened as an effective disarmament negotiation body. We also hope that the forthcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will represent a decisive step in the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime, and that progress will be made towards the objective of nuclear disarmament.

I strongly believe that States Members of the United Nations and the international community as a whole must continue efforts to strengthen the prohibition of land mines, which is one specific front in protecting the physical security to which I referred. Last year our Government established an International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our aim is to help Bosnia and Herzegovina and other mine-affected countries in the region get rid of those lethal, hidden weapons, and to help those who have been wounded by them. In only the first year of its existence, the International Trust Fund has achieved many positive results in Bosnia; it is now extending its activities to Kosovo.

There are many ways in which United Nations Member States can contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. I would like to point out that Slovenia has joined a number of other nations in committing itself to tackling the security challenges of South-Eastern Europe. In establishing the Stability Pact, the international community has formed a framework intended to enable the concerted and sustained action necessary to stabilize the region. If it lives up to its early promise — and we intend to work hard to make sure that it does — the Stability Pact could be the key factor in bringing lasting peace, economic recovery and development to a very troubled neighbourhood. That such a wide range of States and international organizations — not least the United Nations — have committed themselves to helping in this very ambitious task gives us grounds for hope.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the question with which I started: at the end of the millennium, how does the human race stand? Are there grounds for hope? Do we have the institutions and strategies needed to deal with our problems? If not, can we modify and redesign them? Even in the face of tragic conflicts, I believe that the answer to these questions must be "yes".

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Janez Drnovsek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I call now on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Papua New Guinea, His Excellency The Honourable Sir Michael Somare.

Sir Michael Somare (Papua New Guinea): On behalf of the people and the Government of Papua New Guinea, I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. His unanimous election shows the esteem in which the international community holds him personally, and his country, Namibia. The Papua New Guinea delegation is confident that he will guide the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly to a successful conclusion. My congratulations go also to the other Assembly officers.

May I also take this opportunity to express my delegation's sincere appreciation to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, for his outstanding stewardship in facilitating the work of the fifty-third session.

We would also like to place on record our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his diplomatic skill and for the leadership he has provided on major issues of international concern. I must also congratulate the Secretariat staff for the tremendous work they put into the discharge of their functions and duties, at times under very difficult and dangerous circumstances.

Like others who have spoken before me, I too congratulate on behalf of the people and the Government of Papua New Guinea the three new Member States, all from the South Pacific Forum region — the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Kiribati and the Kingdom of Tonga — and welcome them into the United Nations family. I would also like to pay tribute to all Member States which made their admission possible. This is an Organization in which smallness in terms of population or size should not be a handicap. I am confident that the work of the United Nations will only be enhanced through the sharing of the particular experiences and knowledge that these three new Members will bring.

It has only been a little over two months since the new Government, of which I am a part, was elected to office in my country. But this time has been hectic and very challenging. The Government has been confronted with problems inherited from previous Governments over the last 23 years of our independence and especially over the last two years. These have been compounded by other problems associated with the recent downturn in the global economy, with the economic crisis in the Asia-Pacific region and with natural disasters, all of which we have little control over.

This experience, together with my country's location and its close relations with other countries in the region, defines my Government's foreign policy focus on partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region. This point has been brought home by a series of natural disasters which have affected Papua New Guinea over the last 10 years. There have been 30 of them in that decade. The droughts, floods, bush fires, cyclones, frosts, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis and landslides have shown that peoples and States throughout the world have to be partners in dealing with the causes and consequences of such disasters, and must manifest preparedness to take responsive and remedial measures. There must be a global partnership in developing appropriate mechanisms for disaster prevention and disaster reduction.

When my Government came into office on 14 July this year, it had five main priorities. These are: restoring integrity to the institutions of the State; stabilizing the exchange rate of our currency, the kina, and containing inflation and reestablishing constructive dialogue with Papua New Guinea's development partners; restoring stability to the national budget, focusing on fewer and more important priority areas and advancing the privatization of some of our public institutions for a fair run; creating better conditions for the private sector by removing barriers to investment growth; and continuing the Bougainville peace process.

My Government has addressed these challenges, including a comprehensive programme of structural adjustment through the mini-budget recently adopted by Parliament. In doing so, we are working hard to make sure that a strong and efficient private sector can contribute to public welfare and national development. By the same token we are also reviewing the size and effectiveness of the public sector to make it more responsive to the desires and aspirations of our people. The results, together with other measures we have adopted, will, we hope, stabilize the economy, thereby stimulating economic growth. The signs are very encouraging.

I know that as a small open economy, my country's development is directly influenced by global factors, including world market prices for our products. Currently, my country is suffering from the economic crisis experienced by our major trading partners in Asia, and we are forced to undertake significant reform programmes to protect our economy and our people. In this regard, we turn to international financial institutions to help us restructure our economy. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank have been very positive in their responses to our policies, especially my Government's recent mini-budget last month.

I held bilateral discussions with friends such as Australia, China, Japan and New Zealand two weeks ago during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council ministerial meeting in Auckland, New Zealand. They indicated their support for the current structural adjustment programmes my Government has introduced. For Papua New Guinea to realize and sustain its current reform programmes, it has to secure external financial support.

I see my Government's foreign policy of partnership in the Asia-Pacific region as a building block for the global partnership on which the future of my people depends. There is really no other alternative.

On peacemaking and peacekeeping, the Bougainville conflict involves substantial commitments of personnel and funds by the Government of Papua New Guinea, by neighbouring countries and by the United Nations. My Government acknowledges and is deeply grateful for the constructive role played by Australia, Fiji, New Zealand,

the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu as well as by the United Nations Development Programme and a number of non-governmental organizations including churches and the Red Cross. We are also grateful that the Security Council found it possible to answer our request to send an observer mission to ensure that the parties involved in the peace process continue to honour the Lincoln Agreement. We note the reference to Bougainville in the Secretary-General's report on the work of the Organization.

As peace continues to be consolidated on the ground, so the role and size of the neutral regional Peace Monitoring Group can be expected to change. Re-establishment of police, courts and correctional services will provide important supports and benchmarks for progress towards lasting peace on the island. In the event that the Bougainville parties are unable to resolve the constitutional arrangements before the end of this year, we hope that at the appropriate time the Security Council will agree to an extension of the mandate of the United Nations mission on Bougainville.

I pay tribute to all United Nations Member States, and especially to those current and immediate past members of the Security Council, for responding positively and for their continued support for a peaceful resolution of our Bougainville crisis.

Consistent with our commitment to peaceful dialogue between nations, Papua New Guinea condemns those who employ terrorism against innocent people and who finance, recruit, train and deploy terrorists and mercenaries.

In 1975, when I addressed this forum from this podium at the time of our admission to the United Nations, I committed Papua New Guinea to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. Now, some 24 years later, we recognize that like any other institution, the United Nations has limitations. We believe that after 50 years the time is right to review the Charter, taking into account today's realities.

The Charter should be a document that puts the people of the world on centre stage, and at the same time it must recognize that the Governments are here to represent them as well as to serve them. In this respect, there cannot be any distinction as to colour, creed, race, sex or religious persuasion.

My delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's current and ongoing reform programme. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, my delegation reaffirms the position that the Security Council should be reformed and expanded in both categories, taking into account today's realities. My delegation believes the numbers in the Council should reflect the increased United Nations membership, and therefore I concur with the majority of Member States who have advocated a Security Council of the new millennium consisting of 26 or more members.

Papua New Guinea believes that all permanent members of the Security Council, including new permanent members, should have similar privileges and rights. The use of the veto power should be done away with, or curtailed and applied only to Chapter VII issues. The working methods of the Council should be more transparent.

The reforms of the Organization would not be complete without the reconfiguration of the regional groupings within the United Nations structure. My Government believes that an effective Security Council should be composed of a representative from each subregion of the world. In this regard, due consideration should be given to current realities, especially to the geographical location of each Member State. For example, in the reformulation Australia and New Zealand should be considered as part of the South Pacific subregion of the Asian group. The reforms in the Security Council should therefore take account of this change.

Changing the world, through decolonization, from a system of relations between imperial powers and the colonized to a partnership between sovereign States is among the United Nations greatest achievements. The process, however, will not be complete until the remaining 17 non-self-governing territories have exercised their inalienable right to self-determination and/or achieved self-government and, where appropriate, independence. Neither small size nor remoteness should be allowed to qualify or limit this inalienable right.

On the regional front, Papua New Guinea is pleased to note the progress made in implementing the Matignon Accords, culminating in the recent agreement contained in the Noumea Accord, which confirms the way forward for the exercise of the right of self-determination by the people of New Caledonia, especially the indigenous Kanak people. The Noumea Accord will, we believe, provide a sound basis for the future fulfilment of all legitimate political aspirations. We urge all parties to honour both its letter and spirit.

We acknowledge that the United Nations Decade for Decolonization will come to an end next year. We urge the administering Powers and the members of the Special Committee to work together to develop a new programme of action for the year 2000 and beyond.

On East Timor, my Government welcomed the agreement between the Republic of Indonesia, the Portuguese Republic and the United Nations on 5 May 1999, which enabled the United Nations to organize the ballot on 30 August. The overwhelming 98.6 per cent turnout at the ballot and the 78.2 per cent vote in favour of independence are very clear.

My Government calls on all parties to respect the results of the United Nations-supervised ballot and the wishes of the East Timorese people. Although since the ballot there have been deaths, massive destruction of property and the undemocratic and forced displacement of people by the militias and certain members of the Indonesian military who did not accept the results, we are pleased that this has changed after the recent announcement by the President of the Republic of Indonesia, B. J. Habibie, reaffirmed by Foreign Minister Alatas yesterday. Democracy is all about the will of the majority. It is not about unanimity, nor is it about enforced application of rules by a minority.

We are also pleased that the Government of Indonesia was able to recognise its obligations — not only as a party to the 5 May Agreement, but also as a Member of the United Nations — to permit the deployment of a Security Council-sanctioned multinational peacekeeping force in East Timor.

At the same time, however, it is our fervent hope that in the interests of the long-term security and stability of the region, the leaders and the people of East Timor will also make peace with their neighbours. It is important for them to acknowledge the fact that it was the Government of Indonesia that made it possible for the people to exercise their right to self-determination.

We are firmly committed to the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, including issues of climate change and the consequent effects of rising sea levels. We strongly urge its full implementation. My Government will continue to follow and support the future work on these issues, including the special session of the General Assembly on small island developing States to be held on 27 and 28 September 1999. The world's leading scientists have concluded that the rise in global temperatures poses serious threats, including sea-level rise and an increase in natural catastrophes such as the El Niño and La Niña phenomena.

The greatest challenge for the United Nations is to strengthen the global community's capacity to respond promptly and effectively to natural disasters. The devastation caused by the recent earthquakes in Taiwan and Turkey and by the floods in the United States and in the Bahamas resulting from hurricane Floyd makes it all the more imperative for the international community to take positive action.

On the question of the management of the oceans and seas, Papua New Guinea joins others in calling on Member States at this session of the General Assembly to work together on a resolution to establish a consultative process to improve coordination and management of the programmes for the protection of the oceans and seas. At this Assembly session we should formalize this process.

We are concerned that at the recent meeting of the Council of the International Seabed Authority in Jamaica, a number of States appeared to be more preoccupied with reducing our potential to prosper from prospecting, exploring and exploiting the deep seabed. The debate in Jamaica clearly reflected that the States with stringent environmental guidelines no longer endorse the principle of a global commons. They now find themselves caught up in a conflict of interest in which their role as guardians of the global commons is now being overshadowed by their desire to grab the benefits for themselves, with little or no sense of obligation to the world community at large.

We have also noted a tendency by countries that have co-sponsored pioneer investors in deep-sea mining to try to avoid their international obligations towards the environment. We are particularly concerned that they have placed the interests of investors above the interests of the global community. We make particular mention of the trend to withhold information from the International Seabed Authority under the guise of "confidentiality", "proprietary interests", and "information of a scientifically sensitive nature": these are merely codes for denying global communities access to information that might allow them to prepare better for disaster prevention and other actions needed to protect the environment.

Regarding nuclear issues, Papua New Guinea, consistent with our shared commitment to a stable,

peaceful and environmentally safe world, supports the objectives of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Together with our partners in the South Pacific Forum, we continue to reaffirm our commitment to maintaining the South Pacific region as a nuclear-weapon-free zone. We also express our support for the other regional nuclear-weapon-free zones in Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, and also for the proposed new initiatives for Central and South Asia.

We call on all nuclear-weapon and threshold States to stop all testing, manufacturing and stockpiling of these weapons and to take steps towards the destruction of all nuclear weapons. Indeed, the same principle should apply to all weapons of mass destruction.

The South Pacific Forum members have always maintained that we have a right to ban transboundary movements of radioactive and other hazardous wastes, within and through the region. We also continue to share the position that appropriate compensatory mechanisms should be established to compensate victims of past nuclear tests and provide compensation for damage resulting from any accidents.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that Papua New Guinea is firmly committed to the United Nations Charter; to the reforms initiated by the Secretary-General, especially those relating to the Security Council and the reconfiguration of the regional groups within the United Nations system; and to the United Nations decolonization process and the Nouméa Accord for the Kanak people of New Caledonia. We support the determination of the United Nations to work towards a global mechanism for natural-disaster preparedness and prevention; the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States; and the management of the oceans and seas.

Partnership in promoting change is the key to addressing the challenges that the world will face in the twenty-first century. I believe that the challenge for all Member States is to join together to bring about transparency, accountability and good governance as the basic tenets of this Organization, its organs and subsidiary bodies. If this is achieved, the "people first" sentiment of the United Nations Charter will be truly embraced.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, His Excellency Mr. Jozias van Aartsen.

Mr. van Aartsen (Netherlands): Speaking to the Assembly one year ago, I demonstrated that the Kingdom of the Netherlands qualified for membership on the Security Council. During the elections two weeks later a substantial majority of this body supported us, and we are grateful to them. As the Netherlands has served on the Council now for more than eight months and is currently its President, I think it is only fair for me to report to all the Assembly members who showed confidence in us. I wish to speak on Africa, on the Council, and on shifting our attention from the State to the people.

Most of today's armed conflicts are in Africa. From Sierra Leone to Eritrea and from the Sudan to the Congo and Angola, Africans are fighting Africans. Fighting accompanies all the plights and pains that are known to humankind, from poverty and pestilence to famine, fear and flight.

Africa is not a land of troubles alone but also of happiness, not a continent only of catastrophe but also one of hope. The sheer mass of Africa's problems obscures our view of its promise and its potential. In the public mind, an unbalanced view of Africa prevails. That view, I feel, needs to be corrected: we need to rid ourselves of prejudice and think positively. Instead of dejection, we need a deepening commitment. Africa, despite the odds, has come a long way already. Personally, I was struck, at the opening of the general debate, by the sight of an African President of South Africa, speaking in front of an African President of the General Assembly, seated next to an African Secretary-General. It is hard to miss the symbolism of that image. It is one image the founding fathers of this Organization might not have had, one image that by itself already holds a promise for the future: the next century may well be the century of Africa.

The Secretary-General, in his report on Africa, has made a link between conflict and prosperity. For this reason, my delegation felt that members of the Council would be well advised to consider this question in some depth, and, in our presidential capacity, we have therefore organized an open-ended public debate, to be held next week, in which the Secretary-General will brief us on the state of Africa.

Let me now turn to the question of how to improve the effectiveness of the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, in coping with crisis situations. On many occasions in its lifetime, I have admired the United Nations for the way it intervened in emergencies. In particular, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme have enjoyed a long tradition of being in the forefront. Many non-governmental organizations, such as Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), have stood there right beside them.

Let me pose a number of questions on how the Security Council performs in emergencies. First, do we not see a crisis coming before it breaks? Do we not have early warning systems? Of course we do. The call for establishing early warning systems has been around for decades; it has become a buzzword used whenever the inadequacies of the United Nations response machinery are being discussed. But in fact, given the level of communications in modern times, policy planners have plenty of information to be forward-looking. It is not the failing of an early warning system that can be put to blame, nor the lack of data. It is, instead, the failure of decision-makers to react adequately.

Second question: Why, then, does the United Nations react inadequately? Do we not have preventive diplomacy? We do, not only in terms of bilateral efforts of major nations or of the good offices of the Secretary-General; the Council itself can be proactive. The recent mission it dispatched to East Timor is a good example of how the Council can be more assertive. Missions are an existing instrument that is, in my opinion, in need of an upgrade. In addition, the open debate on East Timor in the Council, at which everybody spoke plain language, fuelled the mounting international pressure on Indonesia.

Third question: Is the problem, perhaps, the veto? I know this is a popular view, but it is also a tenuous one. True, we cannot ignore the veto as a factor in the Council's performance record. True again, in our discussions on reform of the Council, the veto is a core element we will one day have to come to grips with. Yet, the problem is an intractable one. Tampering with the veto may itself create the risk of dissolution for the United Nations as a whole. The very fact that a single Member State can hold the entire world community in limbo in the face of harrowing brutalities is affecting the stature and moral force of the Organization. That, too, may be spawning dissolution. It may be argued that, without the veto, the United Nations would not have survived its first 50 years. It may also be argued that, with the veto, the United Nations will not survive the next 50 years. In the first 50 years, the Organization might have fallen apart if the veto had not been there as a buffer against the push and pull of a bipolar world. In the second 50 years, in a multipolar world, repeated inaction by the Security Council would result in parallel actions outside the United Nations framework, pushing the Organization, as a custodian of world peace, more and more into the margins.

No matter when or how the debate on the veto will end, this Assembly should meanwhile call on those who possess it to exercise maximum restraint, particularly in humanitarian emergencies. I concur with my German colleague that the permanent five are duty-bound to explain to the world why they are blocking action by the Council. Moreover, we might consider a situation in which a negative vote by a permanent member does not in itself block action.

Fourth question: Does the problem lie in the political will, perhaps? To simply say that the political will has been lacking is not only a platitude, but also a very partial view of reality. For part of that reality is that images of all the conflicts on the globe travel around the world with the speed of light. The media broadcasts live images of human suffering. Understandably, such images rouse indignation and horror among millions of viewers. They expect instant action. As people are being better informed about current events, their level of expectation rises. The gap between what is expected and what is possible becomes more visible and more acute. By contrast, diplomacy comes with tools that may be old and respectable, but are also solid and slow. And so, while in a globalizing world human misery is disseminated along the electronic highway, diplomacy today still proceeds along a footpath.

This leaves me with the central question: Why is the Council often running behind reality? How can we make it catch up with developments?

As I look back at the general debate this week, I think that we are getting very close to identifying the main obstacle. I know that many interventions share a common element — they compare the notion of sovereignty to that of human rights and territorial integrity to humanitarian intervention. To be sure, the question *per se* is as old as the Charter itself. What is

new is the venue. I cannot recall that Foreign Ministers at the General Assembly have talked about this question at any length before. I strongly believe that this issue was bound to surface at this level at some point or another.

In 1945, the architects of this Organization included two contradictory premises: respect for territorial integrity and political independence, on the one hand; and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, on the other. The world in those days was ruled by Governments alone, and so the United Nations was made up of States. At the time, the notion of human rights, although grafted onto the Charter with much conviction, was essentially at odds with classical legal thinking. In a way, the tension became even more pronounced at the adoption of the Universal Declaration. After all, for half a millennium the notion of sovereignty had served as the basis of our global political architecture. As the idea was enshrined in the Charter, the founding fathers believed it would stand the test of time. By contrast, the idea of human rights in international relations was, for the most part, a post-war novelty. Indeed, the Charter is much more specific on respect for sovereignty than on respect for human rights.

Since 1945, the world has witnessed a gradual shift in that balance, making respect for human rights more and more mandatory and respect for sovereignty less and less stringent. An elaborate body of international human rights law has come to counterbalance the dictates of paragraphs 4 and 7 of Article 2. Today, human rights have come to outrank sovereignty. Increasingly, the prevailing interpretation of the Charter is that it aims to protect individual human beings, not to protect those who abuse them. Today, we regard it as a generally accepted rule of international law that no sovereign State has the right to terrorize its own citizens. Indeed, if the Charter were to be written today, there would be an Article 2.8 saying that nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize Member States to terrorize their own people.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Let me go one step further. The blurring of the boundaries of sovereignty does not stop at human rights. In the future, the notion of sovereignty is going to be tested beyond that. Think of decrepit nuclear installations, massive damage to the environment, lack of water or mass marketing of narcotic drugs. Can responsible statesmen afford to wait until the damage is actually done? Or do they in fact have a duty to prevent it? These are questions which, at some point, the Security Council will have to be involved in.

It is not the lack of early warning, not the absence of preventive diplomacy, not the veto per se. I call on every politician and every diplomat in this room to accept that the traditional balance between sovereignty and human rights, between the State and the people is shifting. I am convinced this is one of the paramount issues of our time. Momentum is building, and we should seize it. Let us put the issue squarely on the agenda: the agenda of the United Nations, of the Council and of our parliaments at home. I ask the legal community to keep a keen eye on the groundswell that is developing and to be innovative in its thinking. We politicians have a vast responsibility here. We should steer the discussion towards the people instead of the State.

The Security Council should be stronger, not weaker. It should be a credible leader in the maintenance of peace. In order to be credible, it must be consistent, swift and proactive. It must show courage, drive and vision. It must keep changing with the times. It must put people over politics. That is a tall order. Its decision on East Timor gave us hope for the Council's potential.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): The next speaker is the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman, His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla.

Mr. Abdulla (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure at the outset to offer you my warmest congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Your election to this high post reflects the value the international community attaches to the role played by your friendly country. We are confident of the friendly relations between our two countries. We also know that your expertise and commitment to international issues will enrich the discussions of this session of the General Assembly. My delegation pledges its full cooperation and support to you to make your presidency a success.

I also take this opportunity to express my warmest thanks and appreciation to our colleague Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, for his great efforts as President at the previous session. I would also like to salute Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his great efforts in enhancing the administration and performance of the United Nations and its mission to serve international peace and security.

The Sultanate of Oman welcomes the admission at this session of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to the membership of the United Nations. We are confident that their membership will reflect positively on the United Nations and will help us further consolidate our efforts as an international community to achieve the progress and prosperity we all aspire to, in a way that promotes the noble goals for which this important international forum was created.

The unanimous decision to hold the millennium summit during the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly is clear proof of the importance of that last summit of this century. This is an essential and important step that will enable our leaders to issue a declaration that may be considered a plan of action. That declaration could reformulate a new concept for economic success and development for all peoples.

As we approach the next century with confidence, we must focus our attention on restructuring the work of international organizations in order to enrich and develop the work of the United Nations and its relevant agencies, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international and regional institutions, so that they are able to function effectively for the future welfare and prosperity of humanity.

We recognize the importance of the effective management of these international institutions through the generous and special financial and technical contributions of developed nations and institutions. These contributions must always meet the needs and priorities of reforming the economies of developing nations, which form the largest part of the global market and which provide a large part of the world's natural resources and raw materials. The development of these economies will undoubtedly bring about a more stable world economy.

We call for the establishment of balanced rules and regulations between the developed nations of the North and the developing nations of the South in order to effect a qualitative change in their relations. While bold change and real sacrifices are needed to restructure the economies of the developing world so that they can meet the requirements of the global free market, there is a greater need for the economically developed nations to take bold and decisive steps in cancelling more debts, restructuring the costs of manufactured goods and establishing a new economic mechanism to provide loans and to re-regulate the size of industries and lower global rates of inflation. We also call for the establishment of an international reporting system that will draw up periodic regional plans to enable all regions to achieve the economic advances necessary to overcome their economic difficulties.

We look with admiration and great interest to the European Union's experience of economic integration as a pilot project that aims at serving the economic prosperity of the peoples of the European continent, the integration of their cultural heritage and the elimination of their social and political differences. Indeed, such a qualitative leap in European society would undoubtedly contribute to a more stable and balanced world, especially if it were based on moral norms of international transparency. It would surely be an excellent model which could be emulated in other parts of the world in keeping with the specific requirements of these regions and in a way that responds to their traditions, their heritage and the particularities of their culture. We believe that economic development and trade are a bridge for communication between civilizations.

Therefore, negotiations leading to the admission of the rest of the developing countries to the World Trade Organization (WTO) must be fair and just. Such negotiations must recognize the importance of giving developing nations an opportunity to see their trade and their infant industries grow and an opportunity also to consolidate their competitive edge, in the context of a general commitment to the free market principles of supply and demand.

Our world needs to rid the large markets of the developed nations of dumping policies, market constraints and other obstacles to free trade: free trade should not be a way to destroy the economies of the developing countries. A realistic balance between the interests of the developed and the developing nations should be the aim of the forthcoming WTO Ministerial-level conference in Seattle. Such a balance should draw on the world's experience since the end of the cold war and the emergence of the new world order.

In the present international climate, the United Nations bears the huge responsibility of creating the right social and economic circumstances for better, more harmonious coexistence and for peace and stability. That responsibility creates an urgent need for more consultation and dialogue between Member States, especially at the regional level, towards restructuring United Nations bodies and expanding the membership of the Security Council.

We must encourage serious, realistic and flexible thinking about the Council's role, responsibilities and mandates in the service of international peace and security to enable the Council to be more receptive and realistically responsive to cultural and educational pluralism and to the various political schools of thought in human society. Expanded membership would also enhance the role of the new forces that are currently becoming more important through their influence on international events.

Since the end of the cold war, we have heard the calls for democracy, free trade and the free market economy as ways of establishing greater harmony among humankind. We believe that the road towards this objective must begin with dialogue between civilizations on an international platform of cultural norms, and based on the sound principles of balanced political relations, interests and mutual benefit in keeping with the needs of every culture and civilization. The new ideas emanating from this dialogue could be used as a new moral gateway to relations between people in the new millennium and as a bond of trust and fruitful cooperation between all cultures and civilizations. It would certainly create a new and common harmony in all patterns of life.

We support this human endeavour in the context of General Assembly resolution 53/22 proclaiming the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We support any regional or multilateral action that seeks to solve the political disputes still outstanding between States, especially between neighbouring States, which share common interests along with a common border.

The Sultanate of Oman believes deeply in the importance of quiet and meaningful dialogue between all States and between all parties. Oman works alongside its brothers in the Gulf Cooperation Council to consolidate a positive climate and extend our common ground with neighbouring countries. We do so in order to ensure that common principles and rules are adopted and accepted to form the basis for bilateral or collective dialogue on outstanding problems.

Iraq is still subject to the sanctions regime imposed by the Security Council in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Although the Security Council, through the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), has tried to enforce its resolutions on the destruction of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction over the last eight years, it has not yet been able to agree on a unanimous policy towards Iraq. Consequently, the Iraqi people are suffering greatly from the continuing sanctions. Although the oil—for—food programme has been implemented, it cannot satisfactorily meet the basic humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. In this context, many international organizations and agencies working in the field of health and other humanitarian services have expressed their fears about the dire effects that threaten the future of the Iraqi people.

The Council of the League of Arab States, in its consultative session of 24 January 1999, adopted a call for the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq to be lifted. The Council appealed to all Arab Governments to make every possible effort towards this end through cooperation with the United Nations.

The Sultanate of Oman emphasizes the importance of lifting the economic sanctions in order to end the suffering of the Iraqi people. We call on the Security Council to put its differences aside and adopt a positive and unanimous policy towards Iraq. We also call on the Iraqi Government to cooperate positively and fully with the United Nations in implementing the remaining resolutions, especially those relating to Kuwaiti prisoners of war and missing persons.

The early signs of the long-awaited peace in the Middle East, to which its people have long aspired, fortunately coincide with the end of the century and the beginning of the third millennium. All parties, especially the Israeli Government, must take this opportunity to write a new history based on coexistence and cooperation among the peoples of the region, a region that so urgently needs to enjoy the fruits of stability and development.

The establishment of an independent Palestinian State will undoubtedly be an important pillar for the conclusion of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East. It will also serve as a real tool for the development of cooperation and coexistence between the Arab States and Israel.

We call on the Israeli Government to respond quickly and implement the various obligations and agreements concluded since Madrid. We also call upon the Israeli Government to implement Security Council resolutions on Lebanon: resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978). We call upon Israel to resume negotiations on the Syrian track at the point where they left off and to make every effort to withdraw from occupied Syrian territory to the established border of 4 June 1967.

Mutual security requirements between the Arabs and Israelis on both sides of the border are of prime importance. The legitimacy of such requirements justifies negotiations on the basis of the principle of land for peace. Israel must feel secure and comfortable about the general Arab attitude towards peace.

Peace agreements signed with Egypt and Jordan have offered the clearest proof of the Arabs' commitment to peace and their absolute willingness to participate, along with Israel, in the establishment of a secure, peaceful and developed Middle East. Arab positions across a range of international activities and forums have demonstrated the seriousness of their desire to live in peace and security with Israel.

We are about to enter a new century. We feel hopeful and ambitious for a future in which the security and stability of human life will improve. However, a number of conflicts and hotbeds of tension continue to cause concern for the international community.

In Africa, conflicts and confrontations among countries remain the biggest source of suffering for the African people. Therefore, the United Nations is required to exert greater efforts in support of the Organization of African Unity in its endeavour to mediate in the various conflicts, including those between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in the Great Lakes region, in West Africa and in Somalia. We hope that Africa will thus be able to free itself from the vestiges of the past and enter a new era of freedom, economic development and security for its people and for the world at large.

The giant continent, Asia, continues to offer the most dynamic current force for human development. Despite the successes achieved by the Asian people in various spheres of life, unrest, civil wars and sources of instability are still abundant.

The Muslim Asian country of Afghanistan still suffers from deep and complex internal conflicts. Therefore we sincerely hope that all the Afghan leaders will take advantage of past lessons and use the world community's desire to help them to end their crisis and to give the Afghan people the opportunity to heal their painful wounds.

In East Asia, we call on all parties in the Korean peninsula to work towards ending the conflict and the achievement of peace. Then the Korean people in North and South Korea can express their desire for a secure and peaceful future.

We have a deep sense of pain for the human tragedy in the Balkans. Reckless policies led to instability, a huge waste of resources, the flight of defenceless people and loss of life and destruction of property. We are thankful for the timely intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Kosovo, especially after the failure to carry out the Rambouillet Agreement, to put an end to the pain and suffering of the provinces' inhabitants.

As we praise the human role assumed by the world community in helping the displaced and the refugees in the Balkans, we hope that those great efforts will continue and thus conclude this noble task. We also appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General to restore peace and stability to the region.

The world still faces the nuclear threat as a result of the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology and the efforts of many States outside what is known as the nuclear club to acquire the technology for this dreadful weapon. The States seeking these weapons still feel threatened politically and militarily and are worried about their security, sovereignty and future capabilities.

Making a realistic and careful assessment of this situation would definitely lead us to conclude that there must have been fundamental and legitimate reasons why such countries would choose to spend large amounts of money to secure such weapons at a time when these assets could have been spent on the economic and social development of their people. Among the principal and legitimate reasons for this choice is that the major States which already possess nuclear weapons and technology did not do enough to guarantee the non-proliferation of this technology.

The phenomenon that the major Powers alone can shape choices about peace and war in areas of the developing world may be one of the strongest reasons for the sudden eruption of conflagrations in such areas. Therefore nuclear States, especially the permanent members of the Security Council, should undertake the necessary measures that will guarantee the security of non-nuclear States and deter the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The United Nations, through the Security Council, must adopt binding resolutions in accordance with the Charter to protect the world from the threat of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. The arms control conference which is still debating secondary issues of technical dimensions must therefore seek to reach positive conclusions as soon as possible.

At the last session we expressed our concern over what had befallen the economies of the Asian countries. We also expressed our faith in the ability of these countries to overcome the economic crisis and the crash that hit the financial markets.

Today we witness an encouraging recovery in the Asian economies — a result of the determination of these countries, especially the States of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), to protect their economies through exemplary solidarity.

We would like to applaud the important role played by those States which provided financial assistance. We pay tribute to the role played by the world financial institutions, especially the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They halted the danger of deterioration in the world economy and restored confidence in Asian markets. However, these two institutions should review their conditions for providing loans to developing nations to help their economies. In most cases, these conditions fail to achieve their planned and targeted goals primarily because of the enormous social and political problems which they create.

The Earth Summit for the environment and development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, set an agenda for the twenty-first century that is now viewed as the basis upon which international partnership and collective responsibility can work to put an end to poverty, hunger, ill health and the deterioration of ecosystems, and to achieve sustainable development the only way for humanity to ensure progress and prosperity for present and future generations.

My country takes a comprehensive view of environmental issues. We believe that the protection of the environment is a responsibility for everyone to share. In this context, my country devotes a great segment of its resources to continuing to implement the Rio agenda and effective and objective participation in environmental and development forums on many international, regional and national levels. We also continue to enact and update environmental laws in order to assure adaptation to the best standards of environmental protection against the dangers of pollution and to guarantee the implementation of the international and regional environmental agreements that my country has signed.

My country looks forward to joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) soon. We hope to participate in the work of the Organization as a fully fledged member and to play our role effectively. We thank all our trade partners which have expressed encouragement and understanding for our application for membership. We are determined to work hand—in—hand with all members to consolidate the multilateral trade system and help it flourish.

Next November the American city of Seattle will host the third ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization. The Sultanate of Oman attaches special importance to this conference because it will be a prelude to the new phase of multilateral trade negotiations, the Millennium Round, which should contribute to opening the way for free and prosperous global trade.

Probably one of the most important issues facing developing countries is the issue of the liberalization of the service sector. Although its liberalization may have some benefits for developing countries in terms of the flow of foreign capital, technology and modern administrative and technical expertise, it will inevitably be accompanied by huge challenges. This is particularly true in the light of open competition from the service sector in developed nations. Oman expects the world community to take measures that would help developing nations develop their service sectors in order to guarantee them a comparable and viable share in the global services market.

We appreciate the admirable international efforts and good intentions to establish an original global legislative structure as a basis for international relations in different areas. However, we always return to the clear truth that in the Charter of the United Nations are enshrined the purposes and principles that we must all work to preserve in the interest of the future security and wellbeing of all humanity.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary, Mr. János Martonyi.

Mr. Martonyi (Hungary) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first to congratulate the President most sincerely on his election to the presidency of the fifty—fourth session of the General Assembly. I take this opportunity to assure him of the full support of the Hungarian delegation in the exercise of his responsibilities as the head of our Assembly.

Humanity has reached the threshold of the twenty—first century. Therefore, no Member State can

remain indifferent to the way in which we discharge our tasks at this session, held as the twentieth century ends.

One of the most urgent tasks of States and international organizations at the turn of the century is to end the ever—growing disparities between the various regions of the world. In this regard, special attention should be paid to the African continent, which is fraught with various crises and conflicts.

The persistence of poverty, still one of our major challenges, is exacerbated by the process of globalization. Inequality is a major source of the emergence and proliferation of all kinds of extremism and of intolerance, with its concomitant violence, which threaten the very foundations of contemporary civilization.

At the dawn of this new century, we are called upon to exploit further the advantages of globalization, a salient feature of our era, while being aware of the attendant risks. All of us in the international community must become aware of the paramount importance of dealing adequately with global problems, such as the growing gap between the levels of economic development; environmental degradation; the dangers posed by organized crime; uncontrolled migration; disease and so on.

In this context, we must take note of the relationship between globalization and regional integration. Integration can adjust itself to the process of globalization, draw the lessons of the process's inevitable consequences, absorb its related risks and assist the struggle against transboundary scourges, thereby becoming the engine of the universal system of economic cooperation.

Most conflicts today are not between States, but within States, essentially as major ethnic or religious confrontations that too often lead to humanitarian crises of unprecedented dimensions. Entire ethnic groups and communities and national and linguistic minorities are falling victim to "ethnic cleansing". Dictatorial regimes do not hesitate to resort to nationalist extremism and xenophobia, and to unspeakable violence, exterminating hundreds of thousands of people, terrorizing others in their ancestral lands and expelling millions of people from their homes. We cannot remain indifferent to such acts.

A great debate is therefore going on in the international arena, as demonstrated in this very Hall, about how the world should react to tragic situations involving massive and flagrant violations of human rights at a time when, for all kinds of reasons, our world Organization finds itself paralysed. We are convinced that, given the terrible upheavals we are witnessing throughout the world, the international community cannot fail to respond effectively to this major present-day challenge.

The traditional concept of the principle of national sovereignty is undergoing a progressive evolution in inter-State relations and within multilateral organizations. Because of developments in the area of international law, national sovereignty is becoming less acceptable as a justification for Governments in cases of serious violations within their countries of universally recognized international legal standards. As the Secretary-General rightly said, in our era of globalization the collective interest represents national interests. Fortunately, today the principles of good governance are prevailing and flourishing in an ever-growing number of countries.

In the immediate vicinity of my country, a regime based on extreme nationalism has sparked four wars in the last decade. The international community, albeit after hesitation and delay, took the necessary measures. In the case of Kosovo, it did so with great resolve and consistency. In the wake of the action undertaken to defend universally recognized values, and thanks to the presence of international military forces and the United Nations mission, a fragile peace reigns today in that martyred region, and considerable, increasingly effective efforts are being deployed there with a view to establish peace and stability.

In the light of the events of the past decade in this part of Europe, let us state clearly and unambiguously that it would be pointless to expect democratization in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia if things remain unchanged in Belgrade. However, a new Serbia, emerging from tragedy and destruction, free of the burdens of the past, would no doubt be able to rely on the understanding and effective assistance of the international community. In this context, we would underscore the importance of the implementation of the judgments of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The Stability Pact, devised with a view to responding to the needs of the countries of South-Eastern Europe, will play a primary role in the rehabilitation and development of the region. It will also contribute to promoting respect for democratic standards and human rights by proposing, *inter alia*, institutional arrangements aimed at improving relations between majority and minority communities within the region.

The international community is again being put to the test in the case of East Timor. Hungary shares the profound concerns of all nations in the wake of recent events, which represent a brutal violation of the right of the people of that country to self-determination. The atrocities committed against the civilian population of East Timor represent a serious blow to human rights. Those responsible for these acts will be brought to justice. We welcome the decision of the Security Council authorizing the deployment to East Timor of a multinational force to restore peace and security on the island as well as the enactment of all necessary measures for the implementation of that force's mandate.

The tragic events in Kosovo and East Timor only confirm the universality of human rights and the importance of a timely resolution of conflict by appropriate means. They also demonstrate the value of harmonious cooperation between the United Nations, regional organizations and particular groups of States, a cooperation that is becoming increasingly important in dealing with the diverse and varied conflicts that are erupting — and, unfortunately, will continue to erupt — throughout the world. Hungary is prepared, with its own means, to take part in this great enterprise of safeguarding and restoring international peace and security.

Among the phenomena that threaten peace and security throughout the world, the question of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will require sustained attention in future. Regional conflicts having nuclear ramifications only aggravate the destabilizing effect of certain crisis areas.

Against this backdrop, the pillars of the global non-proliferation system — such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, whose Review Conference will be one of the major events on next year's diplomatic calendar, or the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) — take on additional significance. We regret that the CTBT has not yet been able to exert its favourable influence on the process of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We would like here to underscore the responsibility of the 44 States whose ratification is needed for this key instrument to enter into force. My country, as one of the States in question, has already ratified the Treaty and thereby discharged its obligations. The international conference to be convened next October in Vienna is likely to play an important role in speeding up the process leading to the entry into force of this instrument. We would be gratified if those States that have not yet acceded to the Treaty participated in that conference and decided, in the near future, to sign and ratify the Treaty.

We would underscore also the need to commence, as soon as possible, negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. The entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines could contribute tangibly to resolving the humanitarian, economic and social problems stemming from the massive and irresponsible use of these mines. In that connection, we note with satisfaction the outcome of the Maputo meeting. Hungary was one of the first countries to join the Ottawa process and recently completed the destruction of its stocks of anti-personnel mines. We hope that other countries in the region will follow our example, as this could contribute to the elimination of all of these lethal devices in the crisis area along our southern border.

We would also note the importance of speeding up negotiations to conclude a verification protocol annexed to the Biological Weapons Convention. We believe that these negotiations could be completed sometime between now and next summer. As Chairman of the ad hoc Group mandated to draft a verification protocol, Hungary is prepared to contribute to any political initiative that could promote its implementation.

I cannot fail to mention the establishment of an International Criminal Court — a deeply significant undertaking. In our view, the Court is an indispensable institution if we are to take action against crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Court will not only bring to justice people who have been accused of serious crimes, but will also act as a deterrent, thereby contributing to the maintenance of regional and international peace and security. We hope that the number of signatures and ratifications of the Rome Statute will continue to grow and that disputed questions relating to the universal acceptance of the Court will be resolved as soon as possible.

Acts of terrorism in recent weeks sadly remind us of the great challenge involved in combating this phenomenon. They underscore the importance of making new efforts and the imperative need for concerted international action in this area. We hope that at this session of the General Assembly we will be able to go beyond the universal introduction and complete implementation of international agreements relating to terrorism that are already in force, and move forward the work of finalizing international agreements relating to

nuclear terrorism and the prevention of financing for terrorism.

The authority and prestige of the United Nations depend to a large extent on the capacity of its Member States to reform the Organization. In the light of the experience of recent years, it is very clear that reform is a long-term process and will be probably consist of various interconnected stages. The achievements thus far, though insufficient in themselves, are valuable elements that must be built upon if we are to go further along this long road leading to the transformation and revitalization of the world Organization, including the reform of the Security Council. What is certain is that if we are to succeed, all Member States, without exception, will have to get to work with a greater sense of commitment. We expect the millennium summit, to be held next year, to give the necessary impetus to the dynamic continuation of United Nations reform.

As has been repeated on many occasions, our paramount task today is to make this unique Organization, the United Nations, capable of preserving the values of our civilization in a twenty-first century that promises to be turbulent. At the dawn of the year 2000, which also marks the thousandth anniversary of the foundation of our State, it is up to all of us — Governments, the business world and civil society — to make our planet a decent and habitable place for future generations.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland, His Excellency Mr. Halldór Ásgrímsson.

Mr. Ásgrímsson (Iceland): Allow me at the outset to congratulate the President heartily on his election. His post is a challenging one, and I am particularly pleased that this session is being chaired by a colleague from Namibia, which is an important partner for my country.

The crucial role of the United Nations in the global community can never be overstated. As this millennium draws to a close, it is natural to take stock of the past and try to foresee what the future holds in store. The Organization's reform measures have included an inward look at the organizational structure and personnel matters and, last but not least, its financial make-up. In this respect, many feel that more needs to be done. We must have the courage to scrutinize not only the Organization itself, but also the manner in which the Member States conduct their business inside these walls. While we are going through this process, the utmost care should be taken to prevent the discussion from negatively affecting the public image of the Organization. Moreover, we should make sure that it does not have detrimental effects on the morale of the United Nations international staff, whom we depend upon for the smooth operation of the difficult and often dangerous tasks we assign to them. A constructive approach to reform is vital for the future of the United Nations.

There is a real need to strengthen the ability of the United Nations to tackle the complex challenges of the modern world. A case in point is the Working Group on the reform of the Security Council, which has deliberated for years without tangible results, with no end in sight. This constant repetition can serve only to weaken the United Nations, which has proved itself on many occasions to be of fundamental importance to mankind.

But it is not only the organizational structures that need to be adapted. We need also to look at the substance. In this regard, I welcome the emphasis placed by the Secretary-General in his recent report on creating a culture of prevention. As he correctly points out, our political and organizational cultures and practices remain oriented far more towards reaction than prevention. This needs to be changed; the efficiency of the United Nations might thereby be greatly enhanced.

During a recent meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the five Nordic countries held in Iceland, we issued a joint declaration against the use of child soldiers. In the declaration it is noted that the current protection of children in armed conflicts is insufficient and that international standards must be raised. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child this year, the Nordic Ministers support the urgent finalization of an optional protocol to ensure that persons below the age of 18 years are not recruited into armed forces or into armed groups distinct from governmental forces. Children should not be forced to take part in hostilities under any circumstances.

In this regard, I would like to express my satisfaction with the work carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, especially for his efforts to make non-governmental forces around the world refrain from using child soldiers.

The vast majority of United Nations Member States have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have committed ourselves to certain actions to promote children's rights. Causing children to take part

in armed conflicts or otherwise putting them at risk of becoming victims of such hostilities is clearly against the best interests of the child, which should always be our primary consideration. There is another powerful reason to protect children: they are our future. Protecting today's children is in itself an important contribution towards peace and towards creating a culture of prevention. We should also strive to ensure that children are able to enjoy their rights during transitional periods following armed conflicts or other emergency situations until enough stability has been achieved to start reconstruction.

It seems that not a week goes by in our world without countries and indeed the international community having to watch in horror as cowardly terrorists target people going about the business of their everyday lives. The murdering of innocents will never further any cause or put an end to any conflict; it will only add names to the roster of the dead. We urge States to sign and ratify counter-terrorism conventions.

In this connection, I would further like to reiterate our resolve in combatting transnational crime and the international trade in drugs. No country is immune from these modern evils. Given their global scope and the resources available to criminals, Governments the world over must work together to put an end to these activities.

This year we have recognized the importance of the elderly and their contributions to our lives and society by observing 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. The Icelandic authorities have done their utmost to enhance the visibility of issues facing the elderly in today's society. This has been done through a number of projects, including projects designed to bridge the generation gap by encouraging interaction between age groups.

At a time of unparalleled economic growth spurred on by the globalization of the world's economy, the fruits of this growth, unfortunately, are not evenly distributed. We are witnessing a growing gap in the distribution of wealth within societies as well as between the North and the South. Moreover, we have been witnessing an appalling trend whereby the curse of poverty has increasingly been falling upon the shoulders of women. There are no easy answers on how to tackle this problem in the short term, but two long-term approaches stand out regarding the empowerment and advancement of women. They are education and respect for human rights.

An educated woman passes knowledge to her children, which is not as often the case with men. It is universally accepted that education and social development go hand in hand and are conditions for a peaceful and prosperous world. In this age of globalization and technology, it becomes ever more important to ensure universal education. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate education into development projects. For the past few years we have been doing that through training in the fisheries sector as well as by conducting adult literacy programmes for women in countries such as Namibia. Similar programmes are being prepared for Malawi and Mozambique.

Vigorous efforts also have to be made to end other forms of discrimination against women. This applies not only at the national level but also at the international level, where the actions of international organizations are increasingly having a direct impact on peoples' lives, for example through crisis management. When carrying out such tasks, it is the duty of the organizations concerned to ensure that women and their interests are represented at the negotiating table.

During the high-level segment of this year's session of the Economic and Social Council, the Icelandic delegation paid special attention to the plight of the urban poor who inhabit coastal regions around the world. Today, my country, Iceland, has a thriving economy based on our fishing industry. The development of a viable fishing industry has strengthened the economy by creating employment opportunities and prosperity, which in turn have benefitted the population at large. It is self-evident that a developed fisheries sector can be a crucial factor in enhancing the food security of developing countries. The Icelandic authorities have urged private companies to invest in the fisheries sectors of many developing countries. Partnerships forged in this manner between firms in my country and a number of developing countries have led to transfer of technology in this field, thereby spurring economic growth and development in the coastal regions in question.

We believe that many developing countries can benefit much more from rational utilization of the resources of the oceans. Therefore, approximately half of our development cooperation has been concentrated on research and training in the fisheries sector, putting an emphasis on the sustainable utilization of natural resources.

Through the years, Iceland has placed particular importance on the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. During its seventh session,

earlier this year, the Icelandic Government noted the necessity of abolishing State subsidies that contribute to overcapacity in the fisheries sector worldwide, and participated actively in discussions on the need for improved coordination within the United Nations system in the field of ocean affairs. It is our view that the overall debate on the oceans can be improved. It is, however, our firm belief that efforts to improve the handling of ocean issues should draw upon existing institutional resources. These efforts should also carefully take into account the principle that global bodies should not try to solve local or regional problems of fisheries management. The management of living marine resources is a very complex and sensitive task that has to be dealt with using the most advanced scientific knowledge available and in harmony with local socio-economic and environmental circumstances.

Conflicts where the civilian population is expressly targeted are abhorrent and leave scars that take generations to heal. Once again, we have witnessed the emergence of the dark and evil side of human nature in the horrible ethnic cleansing that took place in the recent conflict in Kosovo. It would have been desirable if the United Nations could have played an all-encompassing role in the settlement of that conflict.

In this regard, I would like to endorse the position put forward on humanitarian intervention by the Secretary-General. When a State not only stops protecting the rights of its citizens but turns against them through gross violations of human rights, the international community cannot and should not stand idly by.

Iceland currently holds the chair of the Council of Europe, which encompasses 41 European countries. I would like to take this opportunity to stress the value and importance of close cooperation between the Council and the United Nations in the field of human rights. We have recent examples of such practical cooperation in Kosovo, where the Council of Europe is working together with the United Nations and other organizations in fulfilment of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and the European Union-led Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Referring again to the benefits of prevention, I should say that prevention is at the very centre of the Council of Europe's work on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The agreement between Portugal and Indonesia on the future of East Timor was historic, as was the referendum which took place. The appalling violence that followed is a cause of great concern. Every effort has to be made to halt it and to punish those responsible. My Government fully supports Security Council resolution 1264 (1999) and welcomes the speedy deployment of the multinational force. Nothing should be allowed to delay the process towards the independence of East Timor.

We welcome also the change of pace in the Middle East peace process. The positive developments in the last few months between the Israelis and the Palestinians have been very encouraging, and we sincerely hope that this renewed momentum will carry us towards a lasting peace in the region. We urge other countries in the region to seize this particular moment and to start the healing of wounds that have been festering for so long.

Icelanders are no strangers to natural disasters, and we know the devastation they can unleash upon countries and peoples. Our hearts and sympathy go out to our friends in Turkey, Greece and now, most recently, on the island of Taiwan, who face the aftermath of earthquakes that claimed the lives of a great number of people. We have now decided to join the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Stand-by Team because we believe we can make a contribution.

During this century we have witnessed mankind's greatest achievements as well as its greatest failures. While many countries have gone from war to peace and from poverty to prosperity, others have been unable to grasp these often elusive goals of humanity. It is clear that we will be entering the new millennium with unsolved problems and with challenges of such a magnitude that they will continue to confront us into an unforeseen future.

I would like, in closing, to stress what I said in the beginning — that only with a renewed and revitalized United Nations can we hope to deal with the threats and challenges that lie ahead. If we, the Member States, shoulder our responsibilities and implement the changes necessary, then the United Nations will always be at the forefront of the quest for peace and prosperity. If we do not have the courage to adopt the necessary changes, we cannot expect our children to do so.

The Acting President: I next give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liechtenstein, Her Excellency Mrs. Andrea Willi.

Mrs. Willi: This is the sixth time that I have had the honour to address the General Assembly, and it is a great pleasure for me to be back here in this body.

I would, at the outset, like to congratulate Mr. Gurirab warmly on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Both Liechtenstein and Namibia figure among the younger Members of this Organization, since both our countries were admitted to the United Nations in 1990. The President can count on Liechtenstein's support as he guides the Assembly to fruitful outcomes.

I would also like to extend our warm welcome to the Kingdom of Tonga, the Republic of Kiribati and the Republic of Nauru.

The general debate is an important opportunity for all of us to take stock, to comment on the state of the Organization, to voice our concerns and, if necessary, dissatisfaction and, most important, to offer constructive thoughts and ideas for the future.

At the time when Liechtenstein became a Member of the United Nations, nine years ago, the cold war had just come to an end, and we tried to identify the challenges and opportunities created by the new situation. The hopes and expectations were high, the concerns and problems manifold. It was clear to many of us that our Organization was not fully equipped to face the upcoming challenges, and, indeed, mistakes have happened along the way.

Today, we can say that the somewhat perverse order of the cold war has been replaced by the era of globalization. Some of us welcome this new era, some of us fear it. However different our opinions, there can and should be one common denominator: that we acknowledge the arrival of this new era and that we join our forces to face its challenges.

Globalization has two faces: it offers a potential, from which — if properly explored — mankind as a whole can benefit. It also contains risks, especially for those who are already in a perilous position.

In order to be able to face these two enormous tasks efficiently, we have to work together, because that is the only way for us to succeed. The United Nations is the sole forum that is of truly global range, and thus it offers the only opportunity for us to address these issues — assuming we are equipped with the right tools.

The past years have been characterized by important and far-reaching reform efforts. The challenges of globalization make further measures necessary, such as the enhanced inclusion, participation and accountability of non-State actors. In a globalized world, such actors play increasingly influential roles, both positive and negative. Persons and organizations that constitute significant economic forces have to be involved in our considerations and decision-making processes. Actors such as terrorists and parties to internal armed conflicts have to be held accountable for their actions and for the consequences thereof.

The public at large often mistakenly equates the United Nations with the work of only the Security Council. This is factually wrong, and we should use every opportunity to inform people worldwide about the wide range of activities carried out by our Organization and its specialized agencies. But we also have to bear in mind the immense importance of the work of the Council and must have a certain appreciation of why the public focuses only on the Council's work, erroneous as this approach may be. It is simply a fact that the credibility of the United Nations depends to a very large extent on the credibility of the work of the Security Council. This credibility has suffered serious blows in the recent past, and we cannot afford to ignore the root causes of the problem.

We have to address the existing problems and to design ways and means to avoid further, perhaps irreversible, damage. Strict observance of the key provisions of the Charter is one essential element in this respect, and reform of the Security Council is another. For a long time we have talked about all aspects of such a reform, including the composition of the Council. The moment has come for us to recognize that the question of the veto is at the core of every credible and sustainable Security Council reform.

My country has long expressed concern about the situation in Kosovo and has asked for preventive efforts in order to avoid an escalation of this situation. In solidarity with the victims and wanting to take some responsibility for them, Liechtenstein has given temporary shelter to a large number of Kosovar refugees, has participated in the provision of humanitarian assistance, in particular through the relevant United Nations agencies, and has expressed full support to the United Nations Mission in Kosovo and to the ongoing efforts of reconstruction.

At the same time, we also have questions, and we notice that others do too. How can we reconcile the role given to the Security Council under the Charter of the United Nations with a "humanitarian intervention" not mandated by the Council? What does this mean for the future of the Security Council and of the Organization as a whole? Are regional organizations to assume a leading role that goes beyond what is contained in Chapter VIII of the Charter? It will be important to discuss these questions, though finding satisfactory answers is certainly difficult.

To our mind, Kosovo has made it very clear once more that the prevention of conflicts must be the key concept in conflict-resolution as well as in other areas. Preventive measures are the best means of saving lives and resources of every kind, and they can be carried out quickly and with discretion. Prevention does not make big news headlines, but it reduces the number of headlines on disasters, of which we continue to see just too many. The potential of prevention is enormous, but its application so far is too modest and far too limited.

We know that there is still reluctance and hesitation, but we feel a sense of urgency, a pressing need to enhance preventive activities and to replace a classical concept of sovereignty — a concept that is outdated in many aspects — with a new one which enables us to tackle situations of potential and actual crisis with determination and efficiency. We thus welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization and his very inspiring and timely remarks on a "culture of prevention". We are convinced that this is the right way for the international community to go.

Kosovo has been and somewhat sadly remains a prime example of the need for prevention. Liechtenstein has for several years now promoted ideas and suggestions on a preventive approach with regard to problems arising from the application of the right of self-determination. The international community remains stuck in a situation in which the exercise of the right of self-determination — which is the prerequisite for the enjoyment of all human rights — is denied because it is misunderstood as a claim to independence and statehood. We all have known for very long, since the adoption by the General Assembly of the Friendly Relations Declaration in 1970, that this is not correct. Self-determination can mean many other things, if exercised in a flexible manner and based on a dialogue between the parties concerned. It does not have to lead to the break-up of States; it should rather facilitate the peaceful coexistence of States and communities which are provided a degree of self-administration or self-governance as an expression of their right of self-determination.

It is time to free ourselves from biased and obsolete thinking and to recognize that the effective application and exercise of the right of self-determination is the basis for preventing violent disintegration of States as well as internal armed conflicts with all their gruesome aspects and endless human suffering.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam, His Royal Highness, Prince Mohamed Bolkiah.

Prince Mohamed Bolkiah (Brunei Darussalam): I extend my congratulations to Mr. Gurirab on his election and my warmest respects to his predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti. My very best wishes go to them both and to our fellow Members, together with my great appreciation to Secretary-General Annan for all his work on behalf of the General Assembly during the past year.

I would like to offer a special welcome to our new Members, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru. They join us at a time when all of us, big and small, are feeling what we might call the "cutting edge" of certain problems. These problems cut very deeply indeed into the lives of the people we all represent. They are the ones the United Nations will be increasingly called upon to address in the coming decades.

I refer to a host of challenges facing us on the eve of the new millennium, problems touching on all aspects of human affairs: overpopulation, migration and diminishing resources; economic and financial problems; social and cultural ones; far-reaching environmental ones; and even transnational criminal ones. These are what I would describe as today's problems. I say this because today we are at a special time when the birth of a new century is bound to provide renewed hope for the people we represent. This means that every one of us here, from the newest Member to the great nations of the Security Council, has a valued contribution to make to our efforts to meet this Organization's overriding future challenge.

This challenge, I feel, amounts to a choice between two basic approaches. On the one hand, we can continue to devote our severely stretched finances to deal with what I would respectfully call yesterday's problems. I call them that because many date back to the founding years of the Organization. They are most obvious, of

course, in the Middle East, where a just and lasting settlement for the Palestinian people is so long overdue. Others are the lingering concerns of the century before that. A few even go back half a dozen centuries or more.

Yet we are still using up many scarce human and material resources sticking temporary patches over these problems. Of course, sadly, that is always going to be part of our work. We have them in every continent, every region and subregion, even today in our own part of the world in South-East Asia. But this should not be the prime goal of the General Assembly or of the Security Council, for we have an alternative.

This is to give our wholehearted support to the Secretary-General in his efforts to direct us towards the things the United Nations is equipped to do: identifying the causes of future division and possibly inevitable conflict; coordinating world efforts to address them; and devising effective solutions. I hope we can resolve to choose this latter course, as it is what the United Nations does best. It is why, if anyone should ask: "Is the world a better place for its people than it was over 50 years ago?", we can answer with conviction: "Yes". And if asked why, we can say, equally surely: "Because this Organization exists".

This has been well illustrated over the last few years. The United Nations has demonstrated great compassion for the people of the world. Together with various non-governmental bodies, it has resolutely sought to direct Members' attention to the major problems we will face in the next century.

This is preventive diplomacy at the highest level. It is what we are trying our best to do in our own region in political and security matters through the Regional Forum of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and, in economic affairs, with our partners in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (APEC). The Secretary-General and his staff are therefore to be commended for their efforts to conduct it on the wider international stage in spite of all their financial constraints.

I believe that this aspect of our work is the reason why the United Nations has survived and, in fact, grown in membership. It is why our people still look up to this body in their hopes for the future. However, if we are to continue to enjoy such esteem, it is most important for the United Nations to strengthen its role. The way to do this is clear. We must press ahead with plans for reform.

With this in mind, I am very pleased that some of the Secretary-General's reform measures have been successfully implemented. Certainly, a few complex issues, such as the reform of the Security Council, remain unresolved, but I hope these matters can be completed quickly. It is a crucial test of our ability to proceed with reform and we very much welcome the efforts of all who have been actively working to achieve progress in this matter. What is called for, as always, is enormous political will on all our parts and a determination to work together. We dearly hope that this will be the hallmark of our millennium celebrations.

Today's world, of course, tests every concept of international cooperation. In South-East Asia, we have found this out the hard way. In doing so, we have learned many lessons from the economic crisis which struck our region two years ago. Perhaps the most important is a powerful human one. This is the need to work together as neighbours and partners, to appreciate each other's concerns and to do what we can to help each other. In short, we have learned about the vital need for cooperation in the hard, practical terms of today's competitive, globalized world.

At the same time, we have begun to recognize what we need from this Organization and how important it is for our people. Basically, it is to this body that we look to stimulate our awareness of what will be required if we are to meet the challenges of the new century successfully. That is why we very much appreciate the programmes which have been set up this year and will begin over the next five years to do just this. We offer them our full support, whether it be on global matters, as in the recent International Conference on Population and Development; on special concerns, such as this month's special session on sustainable development in small island developing States; on such basic human concerns as the problems faced by older persons, women and children; on such human needs as proper food and shelter; or merely on the chance for our people to lead a peaceful and non-violent life in a decent environment.

We are gradually beginning, therefore, to identify the kind of relationship we wish to have with this Organization. It is one in which the world body as a whole assumes the role performed so well by its many workers in the field. It does not try to take on jobs it is not suited for; rather, it advises, it provokes, it stimulates and it helps.

This, I believe, is the way forward. For this reason, I am particularly encouraged by the Secretary-General's plans for next year's millennium summit. I look forward to hearing him review and maybe more closely define the role of the United Nations. I hope it will be along the lines I have mentioned, addressing today's problems and suggesting tomorrow's solutions. On that note, Mr. President, may I assure you and the Secretary-General of our support in all your efforts on our behalf.

The Acting President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, His Excellency Mr. Win Aung.

Mr. Aung (Myanmar): Allow me to begin, Mr. President, by extending to you the warmest congratulations of the delegation of the Union of Myanmar on your unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Heavy and onerous indeed are the duties and responsibilities that fall upon you at this particular session. The task before the President of the General Assembly in any year is by no means easy. It is even less so this year, as this session has the additional task of undertaking the preparatory work for the millennium session of next year. However, we are fully confident that your great wealth of experience and outstanding diplomatic skills will stand you in good stead in the discharge of your responsibilities and that you will bring this session to a successful conclusion. I pledge my delegation's fullest cooperation for the advancement of the work of the Assembly under your able leadership.

I also wish to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Opertti, for his invaluable contribution to the successful conclusion of the previous session of the General Assembly. Our tribute also goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his untiring efforts in leading the world Organization so effectively through these extremely challenging and difficult years.

Myanmar consistently supports the principle of the universality of membership of this world Organization. We are therefore most delighted to see in our midst three new Members this year. On behalf of the delegation of the Union of Myanmar, I should like to extend our warmest congratulations to the delegations of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, which have taken their rightful places in the Assembly.

We live in a rapidly changing world. With the end of the cold war, the old era of the bipolar world has become a thing of the past. The world is in transition from the old to the new world order, which has not fully taken shape. At this critical juncture, the world is faced with uncertainties and unsettling situations. Sometimes, the world has even fallen victim to this turbulence and chaos.

In dealing with such situations, it is our view that any solutions sought or measures taken, even with the best of intentions, should be in strict conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. Furthermore, universally recognized principles governing international relations and the principle of respect for State sovereignty should be taken into account before resorting to measures of an extreme nature in connection with a particular situation.

One outstanding question relating to the reform of the United Nations is the reform of the structure and working methods of the Security Council. We are encouraged to see that the General Assembly has taken a significant procedural step by adopting a resolution on the requirement of a two-thirds majority in taking decisions and adopting resolutions on this question.

With regard to the core issue of enlargement of the Security Council, there are various proposals on the table regarding the possible size of the Council. As a member State of the Non-Aligned Movement, our preference is for enlargement of the Security Council up to 26 members. We favour the expansion of the membership of the Council in both categories, permanent and non-permanent.

In order to overcome the current impasse on the question of permanent seats in the Security Council, a compromise formula, acceptable to all parties, should be worked out through enhanced consultations and discussions among the Member States. We are of the view that in the event other options fail to command enough support, the idea of rotating permanent seats should also be considered as one of the options in the permanent membership category.

In the coming year, we are going to convene a landmark Assembly, the Millennium Assembly, and the millennium summit. It is crucially important that the Millennium Assembly and summit should not be mere ceremonial events, but should come up with concrete ideas and results. As it is clearly evident that the greatest challenge facing mankind well into the next millennium will be economic development and poverty eradication for the vast majority of people in the world, it is our

view that particular attention should be given to these issues.

Globalization can cut both positively and negatively. It can bring us new opportunities as well as additional problems. It is true that the process of globalization can facilitate economic development and enhance the living standards of people. But at the same time, it can make smaller and less developed States vulnerable to the undesirable negative effects of this process. One such problem caused by the process of globalization, is transnational crime, including illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, money-laundering, trafficking in persons, arms-smuggling, piracy and terrorism. These crimes pose serious threats to the peace and stability of mankind at both national and regional levels. The nature of this problem is such that it requires national, regional and global responses.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly that in a bid to strengthen cooperation in the regional grouping, Myanmar hosted the second Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) ministerial meeting on transnational crime in June this year. The meeting was a success, and it constituted a significant step in advancing regional cooperation in combating this menace in the South-East Asian region.

Let me also address the fight against narcotic drugs in Myanmar. My Government is greatly concerned about the drug menace, and the fight against narcotic drugs is regarded as a national task and the top priority. A master plan had been adopted to totally eradicate poppy cultivation within 15 years, in cooperation with ethnic leaders who signed peace agreements with the Government. In accord with the master plan, many areas have been declared opium-free zones and farmers are now turning to alternative crops. Law enforcement has been stepped up in the border areas, resulting in increased seizures of narcotic drugs.

While we are quite successful in the suppression of opium and heroin production, though only scanty international assistance has been received, another tide of danger has emerged in the form of new synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine. The new drugs are produced around our porous borders with precursor chemicals such as ephedrine, unavailable locally, and drug-making equipment illegally smuggled in from neighbouring countries. We are redirecting our efforts to deal with the new problem with the cooperation of the countries concerned.

Allow me to take this opportunity to apprise the Assembly briefly of the recent developments and trends taking place in my country. My Government is against neither democracy nor human rights. As a matter of fact, we are taking necessary steps towards the establishment of a democratic nation.

We have a vision of establishing a modern, peaceful and developed democratic State. In order to bring this vision into reality, we are reconsolidating national unity as the number one priority. Necessary foundations are being laid for the emergence of a nation where a disciplined and multi-party democratic system fully functions and justice, liberty and equality prevail.

We fully subscribe to the human rights norms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Here, I wish to underscore that the Government does not condone any violations of human rights, and the type of democracy we envision will guarantee the protection and promotion of human rights, particularly the right to the satisfaction of basic human needs such as clothing, food and shelter. If there is an imperative need for improvement in areas of human rights, we are willing and ready to receive sensible suggestions and take whatever action we possibly can.

For instance, in the middle of this year, we received a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and made detailed arrangements for them to visit the prisons in Myanmar, as a confidence-building measure and to enable them to interview the inmates in accordance with ICRC standard procedures. As a result of the full cooperation we extended to the ICRC delegation, those visits were successful and productive, enabling both sides to build mutual trust and goodwill. I consider it pertinent to state here that the ICRC delegation expressed their satisfaction with the overall situation regarding the relationship between the prison authorities and the inmates.

Also, in August this year, Mr. Chris Sidoti, the Australian Human Rights Commissioner, visited Myanmar and held discussions with the authorities concerned, including myself, on the possibility of establishing a national human rights institution in Myanmar exchanges of views on cooperation between the two countries on human rights matters. As a result of this visit, we were able to identify certain areas of cooperation between the two countries.

In conformity with our consistent policy of establishing friendly and amicable relations with all countries, we accepted the proposal for the visit of the Troika mission from the European Union to Myanmar in July this year. The mission was a fact-finding one, and both sides expressed their satisfaction with the result. It is our hope that this mission will further strengthen our relations with the European Union and pave the way for enhancing our contacts and dialogue with it towards a more meaningful and substantive level in the future. Similarly, we would also like to seek better relations with the United States of America. Furthermore, I would like to confirm our willingness to receive Mr. Alvaro de Soto, the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for Myanmar, to visit my country in the near future.

Myanmar is a multi-ethnic society where many national races with different and diverse cultural and social backgrounds reside together. In addition, primarily because of the "divide and rule" policy under colonial rule, unity between the national races broke down and, as a result, armed insurrections broke out all over the country. For these reasons, the present Government came to the conclusion that racial harmony was imperative and that, in its absence, various issues would continue to hamper national development endeavours. This rationale led the Government to make peace overtures to the armed groups and establish peace with them.

In order to restore trust and confidence between the national races, the Government has even allowed the ethnic armed groups to hold on to their weapons until a democratic government is formally established under the new constitution we are drafting now. This is a reflection of our trust in our national brethren. At the same time, the Government has launched an ambitious plan for the development of border areas and the national races there. Despite its meagre financial resources, the Government has spent over 15 billion kyats on the plan. At present, the national races are actively working together with the Government in their regional development efforts. This conscious and willing involvement in national development tasks as equal partners has nurtured the Union spirit and sense of togetherness. With 17 armed groups in the legal fold, peace is holding the entire length and breadth of the country.

As far as the question of national unity is concerned, this is the first ever concrete result achieved, and it is unprecedented in the number of armed groups involved and the extent of peace established. This is a result we achieved through sincere, genuine and open dialogue between the Government and ethnic armed groups where we first built confidence and then convinced each other of our respective objectives. The Government is open to such a dialogue with any remaining groups, including the Karen National Union (KNU), where we could build confidence and identify common ground in the sole interest of the country and its people. In this regard, I wish to reiterate that the Government's offer of peace to the KNU still stands.

As a matter of fact, the same dialogue is going on in the national convention process, where representatives of national races, political parties and delegates representing all strata of life are actively involved in drafting a new constitution to lay a solid foundation for a new democratic political system. The national convention has been a successful process whereby we have agreed on the basic principles that will govern the future life of the country and will allow self-administered zones for certain national groups.

At this juncture, we are in the painful and arduous process of building a consensus on power-sharing, which is an extremely sensitive issue for all parties concerned. In view of the delicate nature of this sensitive question, it is vitally important for us to proceed systematically, and with the greatest caution possible, to safeguard the interests of all the national races and not to repeat the shortcomings of the previous two constitutions.

We firmly believe that there is no better alternative to the current national convention process if we genuinely wish to transform the country into a peaceful, modern, developed, and democratic State. It is therefore essential for us to complete the national convention process.

In this connection, it is our ardent hope that the international community will be supportive of our sincere efforts and appreciative of the positive achievements we have made thus far for the development of the country.

Myanmar is very often portrayed from outside as if vast violations of human rights are taking place, forced labour is rampant, a free flow of narcotics exists and economic and social conditions are in chaos. These portrayals are in contradiction to the true situation. Let me cite here a widely known teaching of the Lord Buddha called "Kalama Sutta". The Sutta says:

> "Oh, Ye Kalamas, do not be led by whatever you are told; do not be led by whatever has been handed down from the past generation; do not be

> led by hearsay or common opinion; do not be led by whatever the scriptures say; do not be led by mere logic; do not be led by mere deduction or inference; do not be led by considering outward appearance; do not be led by theory reflected as approval; do not be led by whatever a believable one says; and do not be led by what your teacher tells you is so".

In short, Lord Buddha taught us to accept and practice only when we ourselves know which is wrong and which is right.

Everyone who visits Myanmar can see the greenness of the country, peace and tranquillity prevailing throughout the nation, people leading their normal daily lives with happiness and pleasure and building their nation with zest and zeal. The people have full knowledge that they are on the right path to peace and prosperity. I would like to invite all of you to come and see for yourselves. Seeing is believing!

Our nation is still in the process of building; solid foundations are being laid, and infrastructure is being improved throughout the country. The Government and the people fully understand where we were, where we are now and in which direction we are moving. We think of ourselves as builders, carpenters and plumbers building a house not to enjoy ourselves, but for all the people, who are its rightful owners. When the building is finished, furnished, furbished and fine-touched, it will be handed over to them. The people will decide who will manage the house.

There are some Myanmar youths who abandoned our land and took refuge elsewhere. I should like to take this opportunity to send them a message from this podium that they will be welcomed with open arms if they return home, and I would like to invite them to join us in building the nation. Our future is in our hands. If we work together, we will reach our goal sooner rather than later.

Religious harmony and freedom are our shared tradition. Our previous two Constitutions provided for safeguards against religious discrimination and religious intolerance. Similarly, the fundamental principles we have agreed on in the national convention process guarantee religious indiscrimination and religious tolerance. Although Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country, with nearly 90 per cent of the population professing Buddhism, the Government attaches great importance to harmonious relations among the major religions existing in the country. Accordingly, the Government has taken all necessary steps to encourage the prevailing harmony among the religions through continuous contacts with the respective religious leaderships and the provision of necessary assistance in both financial and material terms to enable them to promote their faiths effectively. I want to state here that there is freedom of religion for all faiths in the country. It is also worth recalling here that a few years ago Madam Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, remarked in her capacity as Independent Expert of the Commission on Human Rights, that Myanmar was a model society as far as religious tolerance was concerned. Though these remarks were made some time ago, I wish to stress that they remain valid and true to this day, and that the Government is determined to safeguard to the best of its ability all the religions of the country against intolerance, and to help them in all possible ways to coexist harmoniously with each other.

I cannot conclude without mentioning what my country is achieving on the economic front. Despite some slowdown in economic growth due to the Asian financial crisis, Myanmar has enjoyed considerable economic growth in recent years. The emphasis of the Government is to promote private sector development and privatization. At the same time, the Government is focusing its endeavours on the development of the infrastructure as a precondition for sustained development. Moreover, the Government is carrying out an extensive programme of land reclamation in wet and virgin lands by granting large land holdings to the private companies. The private sector has been able to reclaim and develop 1.1 million acres of fallow land and wetlands for agricultural production, which will not only help domestic food supply but will also contribute to regional food security.

We have a vision for the new millennium, a vision of building a peaceful, modern, developed and democratic society. We will endeavour to realize our vision with whatever resources we have at our disposal. The realization of this goal could be accelerated if we receive the support of the international community. We are optimistic that we will be able to achieve our vision, and that the international community will demonstrate understanding and appreciation of our sincere efforts to uplift the economic and social well-being of the people of Myanmar.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): This morning Foreign Minister Pérez Roque continued Cuba's traditional verbal attack on the United States. While this was not surprising or even unexpected, I have an obligation to respond to at least some of the many false allegations, gross exaggerations and misconceptions about the United States and my Government's policies that were made in the Minister's speech.

First, we reject the idea that the decision of a sovereign nation to restrict its citizens from certain forms of trade with another country can be classified as "genocide". Our trade embargo against Cuba is intended to maintain pressure on the Cuban Government to observe internationally recognized standards of human rights and to implement pluralistic democracy.

United States policy is clear: to reach out to the Cuban people and to give them hope without strengthening a Government which withholds from its own people economic and political choices and which fails to respect fundamental human rights.

Let us be frank. First, the failure of the Cuban economy is due to economic mismanagement by the Cuban Government, not the United States embargo.

Secondly, it is false to assert that the United States has banned the sale of medicines and medical supplies to Cuba. Those sales have been authorized for quite some time and are specifically allowed by United States law. My Government has taken concrete steps to streamline the sale of these goods, and a number of deliveries have been confirmed. It is the Cuban Government's own policy choices that are responsible for the inadequate health care that ordinary Cuban citizens receive.

In a democratic society, a freely elected Government is accountable to its people for its economic and human rights policies. Respect for human rights, democratic change and rule by the people, not over the people, are the cornerstone of prosperity and economic development.

The Cuban Government continues to blame others for its missteps while the people of Cuba pay the price. We and many others in this Hall share a belief in a simple solution to Cuba's problems. Our advice for the Cuban Government is to begin now the process of democratic change and economic reform and heed the international call to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I beseech the Cuban Government to lift its embargo on freedom in its own country.

On another subject, we heard in the Assembly today a wealth of charges and countercharges from the Iraqi Foreign Minister concerning actions undertaken by Saddam Hussein and by the international community towards Iraq.

I wish to clarify a few points that may have been misconstrued by the Iraqi representative.

The aggressive and accusatory manner in which the Iraqi representative addressed my nation, and the disdain he has shown to the international community and the bodies it has constructed to represent it, shows how isolated Iraq has become and illustrates the hostile and threatening stance it still maintains in the region.

The Iraqi representative has characterized not only the political position of my country on the Iraq issue, he has distorted the day-to-day realities that occur in his own country.

Looking on page 3 of the English version of Minister Al-Sahaf's statement distributed this morning, in a paragraph relating to Iraq's outstanding international obligations, I see that Iraq's stated position is "nothing important has been left unfulfilled".

I think this is an unusual way to say that Iraq, by its own admission, is not in compliance.

I thought the President of the Gambia focused, passionately and correctly, this afternoon on several questions. For example, are the lives of Kuwaiti citizens still unaccounted for by Iraq unimportant? Are the Kuwaiti national archives, still held by Iraq, unimportant? Is the continued presence in Iraq of proscribed missiles and weapons of mass destruction considered unimportant? It should be highlighted that not one of the members of the Security Council, no regional organizations, no

international experts, no one except maybe Iraq, seems to believe that it is in full compliance.

Iraq also raised the question of no-flight zones. Coalition aircraft patrolling the no-flight zones are not there to seek targets to attack: they are there to protect civilians, particularly the most vulnerable populations in the north and south of the country. The civilian populations of those areas have suffered Iraqi military attacks, including the use of poison gas against innocent women and children.

Since January, and continuing over the past weeks, the Iraqi regime has been repeatedly attacking coalition aircraft during routine patrols of the no-flight zones. Coalition aircraft respond in self-defence only after being targeted. Each response is conducted with a view to avoiding the harming of civilians.

It is worth mentioning here that the Iraqi regime does not take the same precautions when initiating attacks on coalition humanitarian patrols. The Iraqi regime has routinely placed air defence systems near civilian homes. Minister Al-Sahaf confirmed in his own speech that there have been instances where Iraqi forces have fired on coalition aircraft and the unexploded shells from the attack hit the ground, exploded, and caused death, injury and destruction in civilian areas. This underscores, yet again and in graphic detail, Saddam Hussein's total disregard for the welfare of his own people.

This also underscores the wider problem of Saddam Hussein cynically creating a humanitarian crisis for political gain. The current leadership in Iraq is the only party responsible for the conditions inside its territory. The Iraqi regime created the circumstances in which the Iraqi people unfortunately find themselves and it is the unwillingness of that Iraqi leadership to meet its international obligations that perpetuates this situation.

We agree with the Secretary-General's conclusion that the oil-for-food programme provides essential support in the current situation. For the record, Iraq has received over $14 billion in oil revenues over the life of the programme, only a third of which has gone to cover United Nations administrative costs or to the Compensation Commission.

A quick word on the Compensation Commission: this is not a punitive measure, but an internationally agreed upon mechanism to address the humanitarian and environmental costs sustained by the victims of Iraq's aggression.

In the meantime, the oil-for-food programme has made over $10 billion available for Iraq's use in the purchase of humanitarian goods. Ninety-four per cent of all contracts have been approved for delivery and more than $7 billion in food, medicines, medical supplies and a wide range of humanitarian goods have already been delivered. Nonetheless, the Government of Iraq refuses to order nutritional supplements specifically for mothers and children, refuses to order foodstuffs necessary to complete the food basket, refuses to release critical medicines from overstuffed warehouses brimming with needed supplies and refuses to increase spending on essential pharmaceutical items.

Iraq obstructs humanitarian work at every turn. It does, however, spend money on luxury palaces, political patronage and efforts to re-arm. Therefore it is no surprise that international surveys have shown that in areas controlled by the Iraqi regime, child mortality figures increased, while they decreased to levels better than before the Gulf War in areas managed by the United Nations.

In conclusion, I would like to make clear for the record the policy of my Government on Iraq. We are committed to increasing humanitarian relief for the people of Iraq, over the obstructions of the regime. We are determined to prevent Iraq from threatening the region or its own people. And, finally, we want to see Iraq return as a respected and prosperous member of the international community through the fulfilment of its promises and international obligations — something, sadly, we have not seen from Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Pérez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am a history student who, like my other colleagues present at this morning's plenary, has the privilege of representing the people of Cuba at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I also have the honour of being one of the 601 Deputies to be elected in entirely free and open elections by our people and of presiding over the Federation of University Students, which is an organization that was established in 1922 and has 70 thousand members in 47 centres of higher education. The Assembly will therefore understand that I do not use word games in my statement and that I do not hide behind diplomatic phrases to express my views. I am going to speak the truth in unrefined and direct language, as I feel it.

I have listened with astonishment and indignation how a people's history can be so clumsily misconstrued and manipulated. Allow me to give one piece of advice

as a young person who, like his people, has an infinite fervour for the truth. I would like to suggest to the gentlemen who defend the blockade that they should re-enrol at one of the universities of the United States so that they may get some credits in modern history. After having paid attention to what was said, I have no doubt that they need them.

The outdated and excessive hysteria that has been repeated in the course of nine Administrations has once again been brought to this Hall. We have not heard a single word here that can refute the forceful arguments supported by the concrete truths and quotations from declassified American documents made today by the Minister of my country. The world in which we live, even though it is filled with inconceivable paradoxes, has now seen how the State that does not make its payments to the United Nations manipulates it on a daily basis.

In the global tragedy from which humanity is suffering, the accusers are the ones who apply unilateral sanctions against 75 countries and bomb and launch missiles against sovereign States at whim. In the case of Cuba, the illegitimacy of the blockade — and I wish to underline the fact that this is about a blockade, not an embargo; and to call upon the American representative to explain to the Assembly exactly what legislation authorizes sales and commercial transactions in food and medicines — has not only been recognized on seven consecutive occasions by the General Assembly of the United Nations as a completely illegal act, as was recalled this morning, but it also becomes the irrefutable testimony of the international community's rejection of that policy. The illegitimacy of the blockade has also been reflected in the growing call from numerous sectors of American society for the lifting of the blockade and for a radical alteration in the attitude of the Government of the United States towards Cuba.

Important representatives in the American Congress have joined those in the academic, religious, labour, business, press and other sectors who believe that the strategy of blockade is absurd. In many cases, those representatives have introduced significant measures to alter that policy radically.

That my country has moved forward with a 6 per cent growth rate during the first half of the year; that child mortality in Cuba is six children per thousand live births; that Cuba has attained health and educational levels comparable to those of the most developed countries; that even in the most difficult moments not a single child, woman, handicapped person or older person has been abandoned — these are even more revealing of what the truth is about Cuba. These realities patently give the lie to the allegations of the Government of the United States. Could the American Government do the same with regard to the dirty war against Cuba that has produced thousands of victims? Or with regard to the hundreds of attempts that have been planned on the lives of our political leaders? Or with regard to a blockade that not only violates international law and attempts to impose upon the rest of the world extraterritorial laws approved in Washington, but has also been proven to be a case of attempted genocide against the Cuban people? Is it perhaps the case that, in its attempt to justify itself this afternoon by justifying the unjustifiable, the delegation of the United States is in fact revealing to us the intentions of its Government towards any other country that does not adhere to its plan for the new order — so lacking in principles — that they are trying to design?

The United States talks about promoting people-to-people contacts. They even speak of promoting a general understanding of the blockade. This is indeed a true fallacy!

It is incredible that those who have perpetrated the greatest human rights violations the world has ever seen should speak of those rights. The United States has the largest incarcerated population in the world. It has a pattern of discriminating on the basis of race in its handing down of the death penalty and other sentences. It is a country of police brutality where politics are commercialized and immigrants subjugated. In this city, as in the rest of the country, institutionalized corruption is called "soft money", and its leaders hope that we will believe the lie that multi-millionaires and homeless persons enjoy equal rights. This is truly laughable in a country where the infant mortality rate for blacks is twice that for whites.

Those who are trying to present themselves as the universal champions of democracy are forgetting that they have climbed into political seats with the support of a minority of the population and have turned electoral campaigns into one of today's juiciest and most lucrative businesses, with hundreds of millions of dollars spent on each campaign. How much medicine, computer equipment and food for our schools, and how many hospitals would that money buy for the Cuban population and the rest of the third world?

The Cuban people can take the floor at this meeting with a sense of dignity loftier than the Twin Towers, because they have succeeded in building a society in which the exercise of true democracy has become our daily bread. That democracy means government by the people, which in our case means discharging the mandate entrusted to us by 11 million Cubans. I do not think that the representative could comprehend that the Parliament of the largest of the Antilles includes students, artists, farmers, athletes, intellectuals, scientists and doctors, who strive daily to represent our people without receiving a single cent in return. This scenario is incomprehensible to people who every year stash millions of dollars in personal bank accounts they maintain all over the world.

How can you accuse a country of violating human rights and not being democratic when thousands of professionals from developing countries have graduated from its schools, and tens of thousands of its young people have been sent to Africa and Latin America to help eliminate illiteracy or save countless human lives? We are speaking of a country that is willing to take in more than 2,000 young people from Latin America as if they were its own children and train them as doctors, completely free of charge, so that they can later return to their indigenous communities.

I think that anyone with an ounce of common sense — and we are convinced that is something the human race can never do without — can see that the country that should be judged is the one where a million people live in the subway, where 43 million people have no medical insurance, where 17 million women have been sexually assaulted and where thousands of mentally ill persons are imprisoned — the country that is responsible for the arms trade, which kills millions of people a year.

Finally, we would like to reiterate that when our people claim that the United States blockade constitutes an act of genocide prohibited by international law — and I could quote conventions to this effect — we do not do so only to condemn those who have committed acts of aggression against us throughout the years. We are asking, on behalf of the world's multitudes and with the courage of free and independent peoples, that the finger be pointed at those whose Marines have intervened more than 40 times in Latin America, those who have supported military dictatorships responsible for the murders of thousands of people. This is the country that in Viet Nam was responsible for the deaths of 4 million human beings; that from its birth as a nation began to exterminate the peoples that had lived there for centuries; that stole more than 2 million square kilometres from Mexico; and that during the Second World War detained 6,000 innocent Japanese people living in the United States simply because they were possible suspects. If humankind could condemn at Nuremberg the fascist criminals who were responsible for the deaths of more than 50 million people, it can condemn also the perpetrators of these abhorrent acts.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The United States of America is the last country entitled to speak about international law or commitment to the Charter of the United Nations. The United States intervenes in the internal affairs of Iraq and those of numerous other States and sets aside funds for mercenaries who have admitted perpetrating terrorist acts inside Iraq. The United States exercises State-sponsored terrorism in its most heinous form, commits daily acts of aggression against Iraq and insists on perpetuating sanctions against it. This is a form of genocide for which the United States is responsible.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq said that Iraq had fulfilled the requirements of the resolutions, and we challenge the representative of the United States of America to prove the contrary. He will say that the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) has proved the opposite, but UNSCOM did not furnish any evidence of that. The Special Commission was simply spying on Iraq and has forged the results of the tests it conducted. Anything that it says lacks credibility. Anyone with self-respect would not defend the practices of that Committee, which transformed its offices in this building and in other places into dens of espionage and brought in spies to work in the United Nations, instead of recruiting experts. It has insulted the United Nations gravely.

As regards the distribution of foodstuffs and medical supplies, the United States representative has falsely accused the Government of Iraq of failing to distribute food and medicine to its people. He is trying to shirk the responsibility of his Government for the crime of genocide it has committed against the people of Iraq. Before the imposition of sanctions, the Government of Iraq had succeeded in achieving socio-economic development exceeding that achieved by the States of the region and developing countries in general.

Before the imposition of sanctions, the national income of Iraq was growing at rates that amounted to 10 per cent annually. Perhaps this is the real reason for the aggression against Iraq and for the imposition of comprehensive sanctions against it. You do not want a third-world State to exploit its resources in the interest of

the real development of its people. You are the one and only enemy of the people of Iraq.

The United States representative claims that the imposition of the no-fly zones was designed to protect civilians. This is a great falsehood. The United States is killing civilians every day. It is the use of force against an independent State without mandate from the Security Council. All Security Council resolutions relevant to Iraq have affirmed the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq, but the United States has disregarded such Security Council resolutions. The no-fly zones were imposed by the United States and by the United Kingdom and France and not by the Security Council; subsequently France withdrew from participating in this illegitimate act.

The official spokesman for the Secretary-General stated that the imposition of the no-fly zones has nothing to do with the United Nations. The Americans must thus cease distorting the truth.

Concerning foodstuffs for children, why does the American representative disregard the fact that under the leadership of the delegation of the United Kingdom, the contracts for children's formula, water purification equipment, sewerage, medical supplies and stand-by generators were suspended? Half of the contracts submitted have been suspended, and they are all humanitarian contracts aimed at reducing the death rate among the children of Iraq.

The statement by the representative of the United States is the clearest example of falsehood and distortion, once again affirming that those who claim to lead the world are reckless political creatures who need to be led themselves.

The meeting rose at 8.15 p.m.